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## **THE DARK KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**



# THE DARK KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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**To all who seek  
the face of the true God**



## PREFACE

THIS BOOK aims to be a brief statement, focussed upon one unique culminating point, of the common teaching of the Church: a simple echo of the high wisdom revealed in Scripture, developed by St. Augustine and by "Dionysius the Mystic"<sup>1</sup> in the fourth and fifth centuries; a wisdom which in the thirteenth century found expression in the luminous little treatise on the divine names in the *Summa Theologica*; a wisdom whose very silence fills the tumult of ages and which, as the centuries pass, grows constantly richer with truths newly perceived.

It is true that we cannot talk about God. It is equally true that we cannot be silent about Him. His name is hidden beneath every word. Thus I am unable to say anything at all about the problem of evil without bringing in my own idea of God; and yet would I ever dream of claiming that this idea was adequate? The mystery of God gives all other mysteries their depth. It is only as I enter into this Mystery that the others assume in my eyes their proper dimensions. The meaning that the Mystery of the Incarnation has to me, the meaning of the Mystery of the Passion of our Lord, the Mystery of the Mother of God, of the Church Herself, of each of the sacraments, of each word of my Confession of Faith, of each of my prayers—all depend upon the personal meaning which my own love gives to the word God. So is it any wonder that I should at

the outset confess the pain of my knowing that I do not know Him ?

Will a book give me this knowledge I hunger for ? Rather is it not God Himself Who secretly utters His name in the hearts of those whom He chooses : of a St. Joan of Arc, a Nicholas of Flue;<sup>2</sup> of innumerable unlettered persons ? Then are books useless ? Yes, to give the “ unknowing ” of love and the ignorance that is truly “ learned ”. Books can attempt to remove some obstacles in the path of Truth, however ; and if they succeed in so doing, they become servants. But in themselves books are profitless.

<sup>1</sup> Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, whose identity has never been determined. Clues furnished by the writings attributed to him are said to indicate that the author belongs, at the earliest, to the latter half of the fifth century, and was probably a Syrian. The works of “ Dionysius ” were widely accepted by the medieval scholastics and enjoyed great authority among them.—*Translator*.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolas de Flue (1417–1487), the great Swiss saint. Beatified in 1669, he was recently (May, 1947) canonized.—*Translator*.



What saith any man when he speaks of thee?  
Yet woe to him that speaketh not, since mute  
are even the most eloquent.

ST. AUGUSTINE, *Conf.*, 1, 4, no. 4

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Attention is called to the following abbreviations used in referring to works in the footnotes :

St. Thomas Aquinas: ST. for *Summa Theologica*.  
CG. for *Summa Contra Gentiles*.  
*De Ver.* for Disputed Questions  
*De Veritate*.  
*De Pot.* for Disputed Questions  
*De Potentia Dei*.

Works of the Fathers: PL. for *Patrologia Latina* (ed. J. P. Migne, 221 vols., Paris, 1844–1864; later reprints).  
PG. for *Patrologia Graeca* (ed. J. P. Migne, 162 vols., Paris, 1857–1866; later reprints).

With a view to greater accuracy and clarity of expression, a few changes have been made in the English translations I have used of some passages quoted in the text and in the footnotes; but since these changes are of minor nature, it seemed unnecessary to point them out individually.

All translations of passages quoted by Father Journet from works in French, the titles of which are given in the footnotes in French, are mine.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# HUMAN WORDS AND DIVINE PERFECTIONS

### 1. HUMAN WORDS DIVINELY CHOSEN

THE ANXIOUS question men raise towards heaven is but the expression of their most holy desire for truth. Now from the very beginning, the hidden influences of grace are at work deep down in men's hearts, causing this very question to arise, calling forth this very desire. To answer this question, to satisfy this desire, God could indeed have left men to the resources of their own intelligent and loving nature—which might perhaps supply some imperfect answer and give some partial satisfaction. And yet, from within that inaccessible Light in which He dwells, God willed to rescue men from their ignorance. He showed them by revelation what He is for them: "Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (Isa. xlix. 15). He even showed them what He Himself is:<sup>1</sup> "Moses said to God: Lo, I shall go to the children of Israel, and say to them: The God of your fathers hath sent me to you. If they shall say to me: What is His name? what shall I say to them? God said to Moses: I AM WHO AM. He said: Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: HE WHO IS hath sent me to you. And God said again to Moses: Thus shalt thou say to the children of

Israel: The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me to you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations " (Exod. iii. 13-15). God spoke again to Moses, saying: " I am the Lord that appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, by the name of God Almighty (El Saddai): and my name Adonai (Jehovah) I did not show them " (Exod. vi. 2-3).<sup>2</sup>

So to make Himself intelligible to us God makes use of our humble human words (while raising them to prodigious heights), words weighed down with earthly meanings, so far as their origin is concerned (*id a quo imponitur nomen ad significandum*), but which deny every earthly limitation as regards the object they intend to signify (*id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur*).<sup>3</sup> Fundamentally, the word *el* may signify (one can no longer be quite sure) the strength of the hero, while at the root of *deva*, of *theos*, of *deus*, there is the breath of the spirit, or perhaps that which shines forth in the heavens; but the cry from the heart of Jesus in the Agony, "Eli, Eli, my God, my God", signifies many things other than the force of the hero, the invisibility of breath or the sensible clarity of the heavens. Never was " God " less a *common* name.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. METAPHORICAL ANALOGY AND MIXED PERFECTIONS

It is evident that to be applicable to God, human notions must undergo a profound transformation, a transformation of which not all of them are susceptible.



Notions which signify *mixed* perfections, namely those necessarily entailing some imperfection, could not pertain to God properly: such are the notions of body, passion, sensibility, emotion, discursive reason. Thus it cannot be said that God has a body, or that the universe is a necessary expression of the divine essence.<sup>5</sup> In either case, an imperfection will have been attributed to God Himself.

Nevertheless, such notions as these, of which language is full, are constantly and very freely applied to God. For instance, in Deuteronomy it is said: “. . . the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, a jealous God ” (iv. 24); and in the canticle of David, we read: “ The Lord is my rock, and my strength, and my saviour; God is my strong one; in Him will I trust ” (2 Kings xxii. 2–3). The psalmist says that “ the eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and His ears unto their prayers ” (Ps. xxxiii. 16). “ Is My hand shortened and become little, that I cannot redeem ? ” asks the Lord of Himself (Isa. 1. 2). In Genesis He repents: “ I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from man even to beasts, from the creeping thing even to the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them ” (vi. 7). St. Paul speaks of God’s wrath and His vengeance: “ Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved, but give place to Wrath; for it is written: Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord ” (Rom. xii. 19). Every image—the whole of poetry—is invited to speak of God.

What is the meaning of expressions like these ? Must we attribute to God Himself the nature of fire and of stone, sight and hearing, the might of the warrior,

jealousy, regret, anger, vengeance ? Impossible ! These notions entail imperfection so essentially that the attempt to remove it from them would be bound to fail ; they would simply fall apart and fly into a thousand pieces. Such notions are barred from the realm of divine things ; they die at the doorstep and for them there is no resurrection.

It is none the less true that God acts towards men *as* One who has sight and hearing, is subject to anger, changes His mind, avenges Himself ; as One who loves Israel as if He were jealous of her, and shields and protects David far better than a rock, a fortress, or any refuge.

Here we are in the presence of what the theologians call *analogy of improper*, or *metaphorical, proportionality*, namely, a likeness of relations bearing on two terms which, while differing completely with respect to their nature, have between them a certain dynamic or functional equivalence. Such a manner of speaking makes no attempt to tell us what is properly the nature of God. It only tells us that there is, at the very root of the divine action and of Its effects, a mysterious reality which, precisely, is not to be identified with such objects as fire or a rock, jealousy, regret, or anger ; a reality which is above and beyond all that sort of thing, and is not therefore directly or *properly* designated by such terms, but only in a manner indirect, *improper*, external, descriptive, metaphorical—yet even so in a way that is already precious, already fruitful, already blessed. For such language tells us that, without in any way being identified with such things, this mysterious Reality does act, though for an entirely different

reason, *as if* It were.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most moving of these analogies is that which Jehovah uses in addressing Himself to His people through the prophet Osee (ii. 19–20, 24): “. . . I will espouse thee to Me for ever: and I will espouse thee to Me in justice, and judgment, and in mercy, and in commiserations. And I will espouse thee to Me in faith. . . . And I will say to that which was not My people: Thou art My people”.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. ANALOGY AND THE PURE PERFECTIONS: THE FUNDAMENTAL PERFECTION

The exclusive privilege of the *pure* or *absolute* perfections, namely those which do not necessarily imply any imperfection, lies in their capacity to transcend, while themselves undergoing a kind of death, the *as if*, and to overstep the curtain of external relations so as to signify directly that which God properly and truly is, what He is in Himself.

The first perfection which here presents itself to us is being. Being constitutes the very stuff of the universe and of all its differentiations; it is the secret heart of things.<sup>8</sup> No doubt we never actually encounter pure being: what we find existing about us are particular beings, particular modes of being. But let us try to separate in thought this perfection from all the quantitative or qualitative determinations which may concretely affect it. In so doing, we shall not see it fall apart under our eyes, as the notion of man, for example, would fall apart as soon as one tried to remove from it every limitation.<sup>9</sup> We arrive, then, at the concept of a being that is

infinite, in no way circumscribed. Confronted with this being, our intellect is as it were inundated and loses its footing. But it is precisely under this aspect, namely as a reality subject to no limitations and hence possessed of absolute purity and intensity of being, that God reveals to His people, for the first time, the proper name by which He desires to be named: Jehovah, HE WHO IS.

What happens to our notion of being, which we had always used to designate the concrete things about us when, thanks to revelation, it is attributed to God Himself? It is declared valid; it is not abandoned but retained so far as its content is concerned; indeed, it has not been diverted from its own proper sphere into some kindred or adjacent one—that of unity, for example, or of beauty. (Hence the *via affirmationis*—the “way of affirmation”.) And yet, so far as its limitations are concerned, this notion of being is negated and destroyed: in fact, as we find it in the things about us, being can *not* belong to God. (Hence the *via negationis seu remotionis*—the “way of negation or remotion”.) Being must achieve a higher realization; it must be elevated to the plane of the absolute, and for this reason it must have a status completely new, completely unknown. (Hence the *via eminentiae*—the “way of eminence”.) The universe *exists*, God *exists*: the same verb is used in each case, and the perfection it signifies is realized in each subject intrinsically, truly, *properly*. But these realizations (infinite in the case of God, finite in all others) are essentially different; between them there is only a likeness of *proportion*. Thus being is said of creatures

and of the Creator according to an analogy of proper proportionality.<sup>10</sup>

God is the tranquil ocean of being. He exists in a way other than anything else. All things *have* being; He alone *is* Being. The word being here assumes a meaning absolutely unique, vivid and thunderous like none other. The saints knew how to rediscover the content of revelation originally given to Moses. So deeply did they penetrate into it that for them that Light sufficed to illuminate all the questions in their hearts. "Know, my daughter, what thou art and what I am . . . Thou art what is not, and I am He Who is; if thy soul is deeply penetrated with this truth, the enemy cannot deceive thee and thou wilt avoid all his snares; thou wilt never consent to do anything against my commandments, and thou wilt acquire without difficulty grace, truth and peace."<sup>11</sup> Yes, I am he who is not. And these things about me: the sweetness of the air, the scent of roses, all these things that I love; and the anguish and the grief, so many lovely things, so many sad things, all these ravished lives and homelands, so many crimes, so many blasphemies, so many horrors—these things are not nothing; they are real; and yet there is always one point of view from which it is true to say that they all are *not*. It is rigorously true to say that, in the manner in which God *is*, they are not. The peace that the understanding of this gives is inexpressible. And this knowledge measures the abyss which separates the level on which the problem of evil binds us, from the infinite height whence it is seen to be resolved.

#### 4. GOD, THE INFINITE REALIZATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF IDENTITY

“ Being is that which is ”, “ being is not non-being ”  
There you have the principle of identity, the fundamental law of reality. This law applies to participated being, and it is indeed from the depths of participated being that it begins to show itself to us, to make manifest to our intelligence its evident truth. But how much more profoundly does this law apply to self-subsistent Being ! Self-subsistent Being is that which It is; in a sense, it pertains truly to It alone *not* to be non-being. The supreme realization of the principle of identity seems to eclipse and to render questionable all its inferior realizations. It opens the mind to an abyss. *God is God* will thus mean that God is the infinite superabundance and the infinite generosity of being; it will signify “ the transcendence of a glorious and exultant Deity ”. “ That God is God means—and this we can know by reason—that His being is not only being and not only knowledge but also love. It also means, and this we can know only by revelation, that He is indeed One and Incommunicable, but with a generosity which is of His very essence and which requires within Himself the Trinity of Persons and renders the Incarnation possible. God is a Trinity of Persons; such is His intimate life. And He is so accessible to human nature that He can be the Person in whom the nature of a man subsists. If we grasp the fact that the principle of identity is not simply the material repetition of the same logical term but

expresses the extramental coherence and overflowing wealth of being in all its analogous degrees, we shall understand that this axiom has its supreme exemplification in God Himself, in the first Principle of beings, who is Truth and Love, and in the Trinity of Persons which is known only by revelation, and escapes the grasp of the philosopher's reason abandoned to its own powers."<sup>12</sup> Thus, in passing from the world to God, the principle of identity is not sublated; on the contrary, it finds a new, a proportional, an infinite realization; and it leaves the intelligence overwhelmed by the boundless truth it contains.

## 5. A WORD ABOUT CHARLES SECRETAN

The principle of identity would be sublated, however, if it were necessary to subscribe to the doctrine of Charles Secretan, for whom the formula of the Absolute would not be *I am He Who Is*, but *I am He Who I will to be*, that is to say, what I freely decide to be.

Secretan believes that it is the nature of the creature to be "something which God is not", and that the being of the creature is therefore itself a limitation upon the being of God. Moreover Secretan states that God is never more infinite than in showing Himself capable of thus voluntarily limiting Himself: "The greatest reality of all is not the unlimited that is unlimited of necessity, but He Who, though limitless in nature, is always able to impose limits upon Himself; the greatest reality is that which has an equal potency for the finite as well as the infinite. God is infinite if He

wishes and finite if He wishes. Perhaps it is in exhibiting this dual power that the true infinite shines forth with greater splendour."

No doubt, for Secretan, absolute liberty is what it is; so that the principle of identity does appear to apply to God—but only in a purely verbal way. For in Secretan's eyes, absolute liberty is not that dominating indeterminacy of will which of necessity appertains to the *Ens a se* in regard to every created or creatable being. It is, he says, anterior to every nature, and the principle of every nature. But since It has no nature Itself, how could we possibly apprehend It as being invariable, self-identical—as the Absolute? How could 'It' ever be really thinkable?

Secretan believes It is all that. But the idea of a being perfect by nature, of an Absolute that is necessarily absolute (herein, according to Secretan, lies the supreme realization of the principle of identity), becomes for Secretan unthinkable: "A being perfect in its nature would be less perfect than a being which would freely bestow upon itself that same perfection: *the idea of a being perfect in its nature is therefore an abstract and a contradictory idea*; a being perfect in its nature would still be imperfect; a perfect being is that which bestows upon itself the perfection it possesses, that is to say, it is an absolutely free being; hence God is absolutely free, or rather He *is* absolute liberty. Liberty constitutes the whole of His nature. If by His nature He possessed other attributes, He would not be free to assume those attributes or to lay them aside; His liberty would not be absolute."<sup>13</sup> So



we are in the position of having to affirm that a liberty is absolute precisely because it is not necessarily absolute and hence may not be absolute.

Moreover it is an aberration to think that it is the nature of a creature to be "something that God is not". God is all that the creature is; how could one find in the creature an atom of being that is not in God? But that which the creature is in a deficient and attenuated manner, God is in a pure and super-eminent manner. It is metaphysically impossible for God to be limited by the creature, to "impose limits upon Himself" in producing the creature. Limitations, which as such are the mark of potentiality, are not in God but in the creature.

God, existing in the creature, is more really the creature than the creature can possibly be, for He is the creature infinitely; that is, as the perfect cause of the creature's imperfect being, God's being reaches to the inmost being of the creature. Thus Chardon could write: "God, in heaven, is more truly my heaven than heaven itself; in the sun, He is more truly my light than the sun itself; within the air, He is more truly my air than the air I breathe."<sup>14</sup> And St. Paul: "God is not far from any of us, for it is in Him that we live and move and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28).

Let us add that interesting and valuable insights are not lacking in Secretan, but they are like flowers that wither away. The highest principle of co-ordination in his metaphysics is intrinsically *unthinkable*, as would be a triangle that could not be inscribed within a circle. This principle is purely *voluntary*. To posit as the principle of things a liberty in conflict with being is to

condemn oneself to frustration. But to posit being as the principle of things is not necessarily to sacrifice liberty; and in that case, absolute liberty will be defined as a dominating indifference of self-existent Being with respect to the entire created and creatable order.

## 6. THE "ZIMZOOM"

To translate the thought of Charles Secretan, according to whom God limits Himself in creating, into the language of truth, one would have to make that thought signify the mystery of the ineffable tenderness and courtesy<sup>15</sup> of a God Who, far from destroying the creature in reaching out to it, does not cease to nourish it and sustain it in existence. This is the mystery which the Cabalists<sup>16</sup> and the Hasidim<sup>17</sup> have glimpsed and which they have called *zimzoum*, that is to say, contraction, withdrawal. "With the Cabalists this word designates the act of God, ceding a part of His place to the world He creates. *It is not a question of a spatial image, as if being were entirely filled by God and could admit the world only at the expense of God.* (This is a crude interpretation which is not always avoided by those who speak of the Cabala.) In the logical and primary sense the notion of *zimzoum* is introduced in order to express the mystery *not of the creature in so far as it exists otherwise than in God*, but of the creative act in so far as that act causes something to proceed from God, and from God alone, which is *other than God*. This 'other' is not foreign to God, for in that case His all-mightiness would be limited; nor is it necessary

to God, for in that case His liberty would be limited. . . .”<sup>18</sup> “In creating the world, God at the same time gives it the means of knowing Him, thus making Himself in some way accessible to the world. Hence a movement of expansion, of expression: all that is in the world is a dilatation and an expression of God, Who goes forth from Himself. But also a movement of contraction, of withdrawal, *because in order to make Himself knowable to His creatures God subjects Himself to a mode and an order of knowledge necessarily inferior to His own proper mode of being and of knowing, that is to say, inferior to Himself.* This is why Cabalism, in line with the images it uses to express the dilatation, the egress of God, which His creation is, clings to the metaphor of the contraction, the reduction (the moderns would say the *adaptation*) of God to the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Here are a few lines of Rabbi Dow Beer (about 1780), the profoundest mystic among the Hasidim: “All that exists existed already in the primal Thought in a mode such that in the beginning what presented itself to Thought was: *I shall reign*; then, when He manifested Himself, showing there is no king without a kingdom, the Holy One—blessed be He!—placed bounds upon His glory so that the worlds might sustain It. Therefore the primal Thought, *I shall reign*, existed in view of the grandeur and of the great joy of the world, but It could realize Itself thanks only to *zimzoum*.”<sup>20</sup>

Like God, the Hasidim must themselves also effect a *zimzoum*: “We abandon ephemeral joys, we forsake them for the love of the Holy One—may He be glorified! Thereby is His joy increased, and the name of the

Holy One—blessed be He !—is exalted by our diminishing ourselves.”<sup>21</sup>

In short, *zimzoum* will express, sometimes with marvellous precision, that withdrawal which God, like a father who hides himself from his beloved son, reserves for the just as the supreme test of love.

One glimpses, Père de Menasce goes on, “ the different levels upon which the theory of *zimzoum* operates: the level of the creation of worlds (by physical contraction), ordered to the divine love; the level of the human will drawn by divine love to a Love which turns the will away from all else; finally, on the mystical level, the withdrawal of God under the appearance of abandonment. Corresponding to these two divine poles: love *overflowing*, superabounding, and love *secret*, hidden, mysterious, there are in man love and fear, inseparably united so that each apart from the other is incomprehensible ”.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover Père de Menasce repeatedly points out the disadvantages, not only for this particular doctrine but also for the religious and mystical life among the Jews in general, resulting from the absence of an ecclesiastical teaching authority.<sup>23</sup>

But let us return to our theme.

## 7. THE PARADOX OF THE PURE NON-NECESSARY PERFECTIONS

For the soul which seeks to name its God, the perfection of *being* does not alone suffice. All the absolute perfections will be summoned by the soul. O

Beauty, O Purity, O Charity, O Love ! Father, Power, Mercy ! Unity, Holiness, Justice, Forgiveness ! Spirit, Light, Life, Sweetness, Peace, Blessedness ! Wisdom and Science, Liberty, Glory, Eternity ! Not one of these notions is superfluous. They are flowers from one unique sheaf ; they bespeak the multiple aspects of the divine plenitude, overflowing like a superabundant spring.

The divine plenitude most certainly does flow outside Itself upon the universe, in a manner absolutely gratuitous, absolutely free. From this point of view God manifests Himself to us as Creator and Lord, as First Cause and Last End, as alpha and omega. His free love proportions the nature of beings to their proper end, measures us with the measure by which we have measured (Matt. vii. 2) : the measure of justice ; better still, through His mercy, He forgives us our trespasses ; His knowledge extends to all that exists : “ Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings ? And yet not one of them is forgotten before God ” (Luke xii. 6). His providence directs the course of things : “ God is the King of all the earth ” (Ps. xlv. 8).

By reason of the multiple effects of this free superabundance, and from the relations of dependence that things bear to Him, we shall be able to name God.<sup>24</sup> The pure perfections, those which imply no imperfection in their concept, will be attained when it is said that God is the Creator and the Lord, the First Cause and the Last End ;<sup>25</sup> that He knows us and loves us, punishes us and forgives us. But it would be erroneous to think that these pure perfections belong to Him

necessarily and on every hypothesis. For God could have been from all eternity *neither* Creator nor Lord, neither First Cause nor Final Cause, neither Knower of our hearts nor immortal King of the ages. Those are perfections whose absence would not place any imperfection in God, since they suppose an innovation and a gain, not on the side of God but of the universe. Their presence does however truly proclaim the plenitude of the Absolute: they are in fact the reverse side of riches more deeply hidden, riches necessary and eternal. A God turned towards us heralds a God turned towards Himself.

Such is the paradox of all the perfections of this class.<sup>26</sup> The highest among them are doubtless the names Father and Love: the name Father in the sense found in St. Matthew: "In this manner therefore shall you pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven . . .'" (vi. 9); or, in the same Gospel: "Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!" (vii. 11);<sup>27</sup> and the name Love in the sense found in St. John: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten son . . ." (iii. 16); or, in the First Epistle of St. John: "In this is the love, not that we have loved God, but that He has first loved us . . ." (iv. 10); or even—though perhaps this already touches upon the eternal root of love—in Jeremias where (xxxi. 3) Jehovah says to His people: "Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee."<sup>28</sup>

## 8. THE NECESSARY PERFECTIONS

But, this time within the divine Being, there is a kind of superabundance more hidden still. It is not, like the preceding kind, free and discretionary; it is necessary. Having not begun with time or by reason of time, it is from all eternity unfolded completely, actualized fully. It most certainly does not introduce in God any shadow of tension, of change, of multiplicity. It leaves undefiled the indivisible unity and absolute simplicity of His essence. If in this context the words superabundance or generosity or spring or fountain be used, it is to signify the inexpressible ontological density of God and the infinite richness of His simplicity.

Under the pressure of the ocean of mysterious super-intelligibility which here confronts it, our intelligence must needs be dashed to pieces. It will split up into a multitude of concepts which will signify so many pure and absolute perfections. Each of these perfections will signify explicitly a certain particular aspect of the total richness, that aspect being conceived as freed from all limitations and carried up to the infinite level (infinite unity, infinite goodness, etc.). But each perfection, while remaining incapable of signifying *explicitly* more than that single aspect, will doubtless *implicitly* admit the indivisible divine plenitude, as necessarily presupposed and connoted but nevertheless as unformulated.<sup>29</sup>

So for instance it will be said that God is *one* (undivided in Himself and divided from everything else); *pure* (without a shadow of mixture or composition);

*good* (not simply desirable to our poor hearts or helpful in our miseries—such attributes still would not place us outside the order of the perfections of the preceding class—but good in a more absolute way, possessing that infinite plenitude which makes Him capable of drawing to Himself all desires and of satisfying all needs). It will even be specified that God is one *as nothing else is one*, pure and holy *as nothing else is pure and holy*, good *as no one else is good*: “But Jesus said to him, Why dost thou call me good? No one is good but God only!” (Mark x. 18). What eternal praise this young man would have drawn upon himself if he had answered in turn: “Yes, God alone is good, and that is why I have said: *good Master*”! Moreover, one will not be content merely to recall that God is one, pure, good. On the contrary, to signify that He *is* in an unlimited mode, one will say that He is Unity itself, Purity itself, Goodness itself: “We attribute to God abstract names”, St. Thomas says,<sup>30</sup> “in order to signify His simplicity”, a simplicity devoid of any trace of manyness.

Similarly it will be said that other necessary perfections such as *thought* and *love* are attributable to God. For pure Being, disengaged from the opacities and the mists which are the fatal ransom of being that is material, potential, incomplete, is necessarily *transparent* to Itself; It is pure Thought, “pure intellectual Light eternally subsistent”.<sup>31</sup> And since It is the lucid possession of Itself, pure Being is also the lucid *assent* to Itself, lucid coherence and lucid identity with Itself; in a word, It is pure and eternal Love. Herein



lies the eternal and necessary root of the free knowledge and the free love which God has of His creatures, the root of His providence, of His justice, of His forgiveness, of His mercy, and of the absolute perfections which we have ranged in the first class.

So on the one hand the divine necessary perfections belong to Being and its modes; and on the other, all the immanent activities are referred to Being.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. "The divine names need not all imply relation to creatures; it suffices that they be drawn from perfections conferred upon creatures by God. Of these the most fundamental is existence, whence the name HE WHO IS is derived." St. Thomas, ST. I, 13, 11, ad. 3.

2. I WHO AM and HE WHO IS or Jehovah signify for certain people that God is and will always be; in other words, they signify the Eternal. But in a deeper sense these expressions mean that God is Being itself, Being-by-itself. God manifested Himself to the patriarchs under the divine name EL, a name known to all the Semites and having, as Creator of Heaven and Earth, the character of Saddai. When He chose a people, God showed Himself to them, made Himself known under the proper and personal name Jehovah, *the* God of the Israelites; but in order to avoid the danger of being considered the national God of His people, He adopted the absolute and universal denomination Being, as the name proper to the absolute and universal God. Cf. M.-J. Lagrange, *El et Iahvé*, "Revue biblique," 1903, p. 381. "Jehovah is an absolutely new name, the proper name of the God of the Jewish people, given by God Himself to Moses. . . ." P. F. Cuypens, O.P., *Theologia biblica*, Rome, 1938, vol. I, p. 32.

3. St. Thomas, ST. I, 13, 2, ad. 2.

4. The word *God*, says St. Thomas, which is incommunicable, is used as a communicable name by those who believe that there are several gods, just as the word *sun*, which is incommunicable

when it designates the heavenly body that supplies heat to the earth, is rendered communicable when used to signify the fixed stars. ST. I, 13, 9.

5. In the system of Ramanuja (end of eleventh and beginning of twelfth century), a system admirable in many respects, the transcendent and spiritual form of the Lord is always "endowed with a *cosmic body* embracing spiritual and material modes. It is also furnished with a *personal body*, the body with four arms of Vishnuite iconography, a glorified body made of a particular substance [called] eternal glory or pure essence. . . ." Oliver Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedānta*, Paris, 1937, p. 322. (Ramanuja was the second of the great Vedantic doctors, Buddha—Sakyamuni—who lived in the ninth century, being the first.—*Translator*.)

The Christian doctrine is utterly different: that God created the universe by an absolutely free, absolutely gratuitous decision of His will, and that the Word became flesh by an absolutely free act, a contingent human nature being united to an infinite Person.

6. "In metaphorical analogy, one has to do with a concept which is *univocal in itself* but which the mind uses analogically by transferring it to other things." Jacques Maritain, *Les degrés du savoir*, Paris, 1932, p. 823. (This text is found in an appendix to this work entitled "De l'analogie". Only brief summaries of the nine Appendices to the French original are included in the English translation by Bernard Wall, New York, 1938.—*Translator*.) Cf. M. T.-L. Penido, *Le rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique*, Paris, 1931, pp. 25, 42, 101.

Metaphor is a likeness of proportionality between *relations* which are externally similar but which derive from different *essences*. To say with Machiavelli that the prince should be in turn a lion or a fox, with Jesus that the disciple should be at once a dove and a serpent, with everyone that love inebriates or enslaves—to speak thus is not to be concerned with essences but only amounts to saying that despite the dissimilarity of the essences in question, and for totally different reasons, the prince ought to act like a fox and the Christian like a dove, and that the effects of love are similar to those of wine. It is in a purely descriptive and *phenomenal* sense that one could say there is in the prince "something" of the fox and in the Christian "something" of the dove. As St. Thomas himself has noted, such a

manner of speaking does not imply any participation in the order of *essences*: running waters, he says, are called "living" because they appear to move themselves in the manner of living things, not because they actually have in them the nature of life—*non est in eis ratio vitae*. ST. I, 18, 1, ad. 3.

7. But it must be said at once that the metaphor of betrothals and espousals conceals an intensity and a tenderness of the divine Love which are far more than mere images.

8. "Confronted with the diverse realities made known by our senses or by the several sciences, we receive at a given moment the revelation, as it were, of an intelligible mystery concealed in them. Nor is this revelation, this species of intellectual shock, confined to metaphysicians. It is sometimes given to those who are no metaphysicians. There is a kind of sudden intuition which a soul may receive of her own existence, or of 'being' embodied in all things whatsoever, however lowly." Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946, p. 47. (This book is a translation of Maritain's *Sept leçons sur l'être et les premiers principes de la raison speculative*, Paris: Téqui, 1932-1933.—Translator.)

9. ". . . *Being* does not itself imply any limitation to the order of species or genera, but dominates all genera, and for that reason is called by the scholastics a transcendental; though it dominates them, yet it is predicated of all the genera or categories of being, according to essentially different *modes*; such modes are substance, quantity, quality, action, etc. Likewise, from a philosophical consideration of the hierarchical order in the scale of beings, we perceive that *being* belongs to all things, to the stone, to the plant, to the animal, to man—though considered in itself *being* does not admit of the limitations and imperfections essentially inherent in every finite thing. If the notion of a man who is infinitely great, powerful, and perfect, manifestly implies a contradiction, it cannot be said to be an absurdity to speak of an infinitely perfect *being*, one without limitations. Thus, for instance, the term humanity designates a mixed perfection—one which essentially includes imperfection—whereas *being* signifies a perfection that is pure or absolute." R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *God: His Existence and His Nature*, Eng. trans. by Dom Bede Rose, O.S.B., D.D., St. Louis and London: Herder, 1934, vol. I, pp. 215-216.

10. "In analogy of proper proportionality we have to do with concepts which are *analogous in themselves*. . . . The mind, having originally employed these concepts in a univocal sense without perceiving that they were analogous, subsequently discovers that they are analogous." Maritain, *Les degrés du savoir*, Paris, 1932, p. 824.

There would be "univocity" if, between *having* existence and *being* existence, there were only a difference within one and the same order—a difference in degree. There would be "equivocity" if the meaning of the word *being* were, with respect to the infinite and the finite, equally dissimilar as the word *dog* said of the animal and of a certain heavenly constellation. (This is in fact the opinion of Spinoza.) There is "analogy" if the word *being* designates, with respect to the infinite and the finite, realizations which undoubtedly are essentially diverse but nevertheless proportionately similar, "participated being" having in the sphere of the relative the same status [proportionately] as "unparticipated being" enjoys in a totally different order, the order of the Absolute.

It is only after having considered the *ontological dependence of creatures* as THINGS in relation to the Creator, and having marked well that according to the Thomistic doctrine of analogy they are more "dissimilar than similar" (Lateran Council, Denz., n. 432), that one may consider them as SIGNS and seek to discover, according to the "Bonaventurian" method which E. Gilson calls "universal analogy" (*The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. by Dom Illtyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed, New York, Sheed and Ward, Ch. VII, pp. 204 ff.), their relations as shadows, traces, images of God and of the Trinity. St. Thomas, pre-eminently the theologian and the philosopher, places prime emphasis upon the first mode of considering creatures; St. Bonaventure, pre-eminently the mystical writer, upon this second approach. In this whole argument it is understandable that Paul Claudel should feel himself less in sympathy with the metaphysical approach characteristic of St. Thomas than with the symbolical approach characteristic of St. Bonaventure. See below, p. 64.

11. *Life of St. Catherine of Siena*, by the Blessed Raymond of Capua, her confessor, trans. by the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, Philadelphia, 1859; Ch. IX, p. 63.

12. Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 97. Far from being a tautology, the formula God is God may have two meanings, as Maritain points out: the closed meaning of the Koran, and the open meaning which al Hallaj began to give to it and which is the Christian meaning. (Husayn ibn Mansur, known to fame as al Hallaj, was a Moslem mystic who was barbarously put to death at Bagdad in 922.—*Translator*.)

13. *La philosophie de la liberté*, Paris and Neuchâtel, 1866, vol. I, pp. 366, 403. It will have been noted that for Secretan, as for Descartes and Spinoza, to consider God as *self-existent Being* is not to conceive Him *ontologically*, as Being itself, but *dynamically*, by the fiction that He has the power of producing Himself, of being *causa sui*. Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Discours sur la méthode, texte et commentaire*, Paris, 1925, pp. 333, 338.

14. *La croix de Jesus*, édit. du Cerf, Paris, 1937, p. 389.

15. This expression is found in Mother Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, London, 1877, ch. LXXXIII, p. 305. (There, in speaking of the "Three Properties in God: Life, Love, and Light", Mother Julian says: "In life is marvellous homeliness; in love is gentle courtesy; and in light is endless kindness."—*Translator*.)

16. (Students or devotees of the Cabala, a system of occult theosophy or mystical interpretation of the Scriptures among Jewish rabbis and certain medieval Christians. The Cabalists assume that every letter, word, number and accent of Scripture contains a hidden sense and claim to know the methods of interpretation for ascertaining these occult meanings.—*Translator*.)

17. (The first Hasidim, or Assideans, were a Jewish sect founded about the third century B.C. by opponents of what were considered "Hellenistic innovations." The sect was devoted to strict observance of the ritual of purification and separation. The same name also designates the Jewish sect founded in Poland about 1750 by Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer Baal-Shem, with the object of reviving the strict practices of the earlier Hasidim. These modern Hasidim have been opposed to secular studies and Jewish rationalism, and have devoted themselves to mysticism.—*Translator*.)

18. Pierre de Menasce, *Quand Israël aime Dieu*, Paris, 1931, p. 115.

19. Ibid., p. 117.

20. Ibid., p. 124.

21. Ibid., p. 125.

22. Ibid., p. 134.

23. For example, pp. 19, 28, 40, 52, 53, 97.

24. Cf. St. Thomas, ST. I, 13, 7.

25. The metaphysical notions of cause and of sufficient reason are essentially relative to being and consequently are analogous, like the notion of being. "We can eliminate from the *efficient cause* that imperfect mode which is found to be its inseparable accompaniment in finite causes; for there is nothing in the notion of such a cause which militates against this; and since, like being, it is analogous, we cannot say on *a priori* grounds that it is opposed to an infinite mode. This mode would explain why the causal or realizing action is not an accident but is identified with the infinite being of the agent; why it is not transitory and passing, but permanent and eternal; why it is not formally transitive, but formally immanent, though capable of producing an external effect, for which reason it could truly be called a virtually transitive action. And this eternal action, which could add nothing to the *being* of the primary agent—why could it not have its effect in time, at a moment previously willed, if it is a free action, and if it dominates time and its product, like the movement of which it is the measure? The formal concept of causality does not *per se* include any of those imperfections which are found in finite beings. To say that an action is causal, means that it is a realizing action, but not necessarily accidental, temporal, formally transitory and transitive. These imperfections constitute the created mode of causality, but this notion, for the sole reason that it denotes an absolute and analogical perfection, is susceptible also of another mode." R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *God: His Existence and His Nature*, vol. I, p. 220.

It is still easier to show that the *final cause*, which moves by the desire of itself that it elicits, does not entail any necessary imperfection. "As we climb the ladder of causality, we see that the cause 'suffers' less and less from the production of the effect. . . . Can we not then pass on to the ultimate limit; and since the world is there and God cannot change, is it not permissible to think that the supreme Cause is capable of acting without

any change being produced *principiative* (in the cause), but only *terminative* (in the effect)?" G. Dandoy, S.J., *L'ontologie du Vedânta*, Paris, 1932, pp. 146-147.

26. The *paradox* of the perfections whose absence implies no imperfection gives place to an *antinomy* in Sankara's doctrine of Advaita; on the one hand, the Absolute *must* be the cause of the world; on the other, the Absolute, being incapable of qualification, *cannot* have any relations with the world. Whence the solution of Sankara, which, weighed in the scale of metaphysical values at least, ends in denying all reality to the world. St. Thomas would reply (ST. I, 13, 7) that the relation which makes the world depend on God is real *from the world to God* (the world enters into a real relation of dependence upon God from the moment it emerges from nothingness), but *is not real from God to the world* (not an atom of being is displaced from the Being of God at the moment when the world begins to exist from Him). Cf. G. Dandoy, *L'ontologie du Vedânta*, pp. 143 ff.

But as Maritain suggests in that same little book by Father Dandoy (p. 170), one might attribute to the Sankarian solution a mystical as opposed to a metaphysical meaning, and thus from being false it would become true: for in that case Sankara's solution would signify that, in losing himself in God through the experiential knowledge of love, man becomes one single spirit with Him, doubtless not by unity of *nature* but by unity of *grace*. That which, metaphysically speaking, would appear as an acosmic monism, "may be, mystically speaking, an inadequate formulation of the experience of union"; we feel, in fact, that if the thought of Sankara "vacillates in its conceptualization, it is in remaining faithful to a holy truth, attached to its substance like a sacred vulture." (Sankara was born about 788 and died about 826.)

27. In addition, the name Father designates properly the First Person of the Trinity; as such, it signifies a *necessary* perfection. In St. John, for example, we read: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (xiv. 10).

28. Love signifies a *necessary* perfection when it designates God's love for Himself, a love which is the eternal root of His love for us; or when it designates personal Love, the Holy Spirit. The non-necessary perfections follow from one divine act, formally immanent but virtually transitive (see above, p. 15,

note 25), like the act of creating or governing. The perfections implicated in the exclusively immanent divine acts, like knowing and loving, belong to God eternally and necessarily. (Cf. St. Thomas, ST. I, 34, 3, ad. 2.) Moreover it is certain that it is in the very act by which God eternally knows and loves Himself that He knows us and loves us. (ST. I, 14, 5, ad. 3; I, 19, 2, ad. 3.) Nevertheless, He would have been eternally able not to create us. In that case, He would neither have known us as existent beings nor loved us as His children.

29. Prior to human thought on the matter, there can be no question of a distinction between the divine perfections. This distinction arises in consequence of the reflective consideration of the human mind. It is therefore not *given* in the divine Reality but is introduced by our own minds; it is not real but rational. This distinction is however *founded* in the divine Reality. For the multiplicity of viewpoints we take of that Reality is demanded, necessitated, justified, by the ineffable plenitude of the divine simplicity. "Considered in Himself," says St. Thomas (ST. I, 13, 12), "God is altogether one and simple, yet our intellect knows Him by different conceptions because it cannot see Him as He is in Himself." So here we are concerned with a "distinction of reason founded on reality," a "virtual distinction" which is called "minor," because the aspects that are distinguished are in fact *co-implicative* and are separated from one another only in our *explicit* language and our *explicit* thought.

30. ST. I, 13, 1 ad. 2.

31. The duality of object and subject derives from the infirmity of created knowledge; it is not essential to the notion of knowledge. (ST. I, 14, 2.)—The notion of substantial intelligence is the basis of the doctrine of Sankara. Sankara does not even hesitate to discuss the question whether "Brahman should be defined as being or as thought," since for him, "being is itself thought, thought is itself being; the two are in no way mutually exclusive." (Text cited by O. Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedânta*, p. 119, note.) In his study, *L'ontologie du Vedânta*, Father G. Dandoy remarks that Brahman is "the identity of being, knowledge and goodness". To Father Dandoy the Sankarian doctrine will seem inexact only because of the negations accompanying his affirmation.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DIVINE NAMES AND THE DIVINE NAME

#### 1. THE DIVINE NAMES INUNDATED BY THE DIVINE REALITY

INFINITE unity, infinite purity, infinite goodness, infinite wisdom, infinite love—all these names are like the sides of a polygon by which we try to grasp integrally the perfect mystery of the Godhead, without ever hoping to succeed in so doing. Each of these names signifies but one single perspective, one single “formal reason”, one single absolute perfection carried up to the level of infinity. All the other perfections are indeed connoted, so that infinite being is also infinite goodness and infinite wisdom, but those perfections can be signified only implicitly.<sup>1</sup> Thus, each of the divine perfections, though infinite, finds itself further engulfed by the content of all the others.<sup>2</sup> No single perfection can possibly encompass the indivisible ocean of the divine simplicity which, properly speaking, therefore remains unnamed, unsigned, uncircumscribed.

In a capital text St. Thomas states: “When any term expressing a perfection is applied to a creature it signifies that perfection as distinct in concept or definition from other perfections; for example, by the term *wise* applied to a man we signify some perfection distinct from a man’s essence and distinct from his power and his existence,

and from all similar things; but when we apply the term *wise* to God we do not mean to signify anything distinct from His essence or His power or His very existence. Thus *wise*, said of man, in some degree circumscribes and encompasses the reality it signifies, but this is not the case when it is applied to God; for the Reality signified then remains unbounded, exceeding the signification of the term.”<sup>3</sup>

## 2. THE DIVINE REALITY IS NOT OUTSIDE BUT ABOVE BEING

Such words, in fact, open out upon an Abyss of Simplicity wherein the perfection they signify is not destroyed or submerged or preserved in its entirety. (God truly *is*; He is truly *one*, truly *good*, truly *wise*; *formally one*, *formally good*, *formally wise*.) Indeed, the perfection such terms signify can receive in God alone, and for the first time, its real fulness of meaning. The words being, unity, goodness, wisdom, are more true of God than they could ever be of creatures; they are “by priority said of God rather than of creatures”—*per prius dicuntur de Deo quam de creaturis*.<sup>4</sup> (I am, for example, more certain of God’s goodness than I can ever be of the goodness of my best friend.) Being thus exalted, the perfection such words signify is identified with all the other perfections in the supreme, supereminent, unnamed, formal conception of the Godhead. Whence these profound and mysterious sayings of Cajetan: “The divine Reality is anterior to being and to all the differentiations of being; It is super-being, super-unity,

etc.” And again: “The notion of wisdom, in God, no longer appertains to itself alone; it belongs to the Godhead Which is more than it; and in the Godhead, as in a Reality of a higher order, it converges with justice, goodness, power—not that it may itself fade into nothingness but, on the contrary, that it may be glorified, lifted up, transcended, with respect to ‘formal eminence’, *eminentia formali*. The formal concept of wisdom and the formal concept of justice unite in one formal concept of a higher order, that of Deity; together they constitute but one single and unique formal notion which contains them both, not only equivalently but identically, ‘not only virtually but formally’; *non tamen virtualiter sed formaliter*”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, “In the very degree to which they make the divine essence known to us, our concepts, while remaining themselves, are absorbed into Its abyss; in God, what they signify, according to our mode of conceiving, is lost, without our being able to know how. The divine essence is indeed truly attained . . . but without being penetrated; It is known but Its mystery remains intact, is not encroached upon. Precisely in the measure that we are cognizant of the divine essence, It escapes our grasp, infinitely exceeds our knowledge”.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. GOD “KNOWN AS UNKNOWN”

This indeed is the teaching of St. Thomas: St. Augustine’s statement, “God escapes the form of our intelligence”, does not mean that our intellect could not be assimilated to Him through any intelligible form

but that He transcends every form of our intelligence: *quasi omnem formam intellectus nostri excedens*.<sup>7</sup> Since our intellect could never be commensurate with the divine substance, the latter will always exceed its grasp and will therefore remain as unknown to us. Moreover, "The ultimate reach of man's knowledge of God consists in knowing that he does not know Him, inasmuch as man knows that what God is transcends all that he apprehends of Him: *illud est ultimum cognitionis humanae de Deo quod SCIAT SE DEUM NESCIRE, in quantum cognoscit illud quod Deus est, omne ipsum quod de eo intelligimus, excedere*".<sup>8</sup> And again: "Having arrived at the term of our knowledge, we know God as unknown, *DEUM TAMQUAM IGNOTUM COGNOSCIMUS*; and our mind penetrates in a perfect way into the knowledge of God precisely when it knows that the divine essence is above all that our mind can grasp in this life. Hence, *what God is [in Himself]* remains unknown to us, albeit we know *that He is*." <sup>9</sup> We know with certainty that God transcends all our knowledge: "Behold, God is great, exceeding our knowledge: *Ecce Deus magnus vincens scientiam nostram*" (Job xxxvi. 26). And what, asks St. Thomas, quoting Gregory the Great, does there remain for us to do but "stammer out as best we may the sublimities of God: *balbutiendo ut possumus, excelsa Dei resonamus*".<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. THE INEFFABLE NAME

There is however one unique Name which expresses explicitly all that God is, and every day we ask that

His name be "hallowed" (Matt. vi. 9) and glorified by the universe. But this Name is subsistent; It is the divine essence Itself; God alone can pronounce It; every created intellect remains dazzled and overwhelmed by the mystery of It.<sup>11</sup> "So Jacob asked in the morning of the angel: Tell me, what is thy name? And he received the answer: Why askest thou my name?" (Gen. xxxii. 29.) It is impossible to utter this truly wonderful name, which is above every other name in this age and in all the ages to come (cf. Eph. i. 21).<sup>12</sup>

In forbidding themselves throughout the years to pronounce the proper and incommunicable name *Jehovah*, in substituting for it in biblical reading the appellation Adonai (my Lord), or simply an antonomastic appellation ("Jehovah" being replaced by "The Name"), the people of signs and figures *par excellence* proclaimed in their typically symbolic way the mystery of the ineffability of the Absolute; and this must fill with adoration and holy reverence all who think of God or who utter one of His names. Moreover this people, without knowing it, prophesied that the ineffable Name, which still remained far removed from the religion of the Promise, would begin to be truly possessed by men and touched by their hands, in the night, only later, with the religion of the Incarnation, at precisely that time when the revelation of the depths of trinitarian Life would illumine the whole mystery once and for all.<sup>13</sup>

Is it not unthinkable that the depths of a Majesty so fathomless would not conceal, would not hold in reserve, an infinite, overpowering answer to the heart-

breaking question which the presence of evil in the world raises for us today ? Herein lies the meaning of the great prophecy of Job : “ And the Lord answering Job out of the whirlwind, said :

*Gird up thy loins like a man;  
I will ask thee, and do thou tell me.  
Wilt thou make void my judgment;  
And condemn me, that thou mayest be justified? . . .*

“ Then Job answered the Lord, and said :

*. . . I have spoken unwisely . . .  
Things that above measure exceeded my know-  
ledge ”*

(Job xl. 1-3; xlii. 1, 3).

This Name, ineffable here below, the elect shall know by being born again to life eternal. God, Who alone can pronounce It fully, will impart It to them; He will Himself form His name within them. “ If we could know the divine essence as It is in Itself”, St. Thomas says, “ and name It by Its proper name, we would express It by one unique name. Such is the promise made by the prophet (Zach. xiv. 9) to those who will see God in His essence: ‘ In that day there shall be one Lord, and His name shall be one ’. ”<sup>14</sup> It will not be a sonorous name which might be uttered in some human language; it will be a name of fire and of light, a spiritual name, a name that subsists and invades the heart of man. This Name will be pronounced in the hearts of the elect and of the angels (immersed in It like

the sponge in the sea) by the divine essence Itself. And this Name will *of Itself* be able to show forth all the transparency and all the fulness of the divine essence. But no creature will *in fact* ever possess It to the point of exhausting Its content or of circumscribing Its wealth; for to know absolutely all that God is, it is necessary to *be* absolutely all that God is.<sup>15</sup>

#### 5. THE NON-SYNONYMY AND MYSTERIOUS COMPENETRATION OF THE DIVINE NAMES

To abandon the sinner to the obstinacy of his perverse will is the effect of a divine attitude we call justice. To raise the sinner up again by breaking the obstinacy of his perverse will is the effect of another divine attitude that we call mercy. It must be said therefore that God forsakes sinners by justice and converts them by mercy. Although in God justice is identical with mercy and intelligence with love, it would be completely unintelligible to claim that God punishes by mercy and pardons by justice, or that He loves by His intellect and knows by His love.

If we were able to designate explicitly the point where justice and mercy, intelligence and love are identified in God, we would call it neither justice nor mercy, intelligence nor love. Its name would be *the* ineffable Name. Such knowledge is beyond our present condition. Therefore when we speak of justice it is to designate the divine mystery under *one* aspect, and when we speak of mercy it is to designate the same mystery under *another* aspect. To wish to jumble all

the divine names together would be, not to hold the divine simplicity above all names, but to place it below all names, and to sink down into the nominalism of the agnostic.

In other words, the divine names are not interchangeable. Each is designed to indicate one distinct ray of the ineffable divine light. "The names given to God", St. Thomas observes, "signify one and the same Reality, but under multiple and diverse aspects, and for this reason they are not synonymous."<sup>16</sup>

Thus on the one hand, since the divine names designate diverse refractions in our intelligence of the divine plenitude, they are not synonymous; but on the other hand, since their content overflows their limits and is identified with the unrepresentable simplicity of that plenitude (signified in its entirety by each of them), they are indeed not explicitly but implicitly contained in one another; present efficaciously to one another, they enter into one another. Each of the divine names is coloured by the proximity of all the rest, which in turn bestow upon it their particular radiance, so that we must not utter that name unless it be illumined by the light of all the others and especially of those which seem most opposed to it.

The divine Being, then, must appear to us as pure *spirituality*, pure transcendence, pure light: "God is spirit" (John iv. 24); "God is light and in Him is no darkness" (1 John i. 5). And this pure light is pure *love*: "God is love" (1 John iv. 16). Thus if, as we have said,<sup>17</sup> *being* is a privileged divine name, it is so only under a certain aspect, only inasmuch as it is more



fundamental [than the others]. But the name being immediately demands to be completed by the wealth of meaning conveyed by the names spirit and love, subsistent Spirit and subsistent Love: the most beautiful of the divine names because they are names of superabundance, of generosity, of openness. He Who Is, He Who Thinks, He Who Loves: these three names would have to be made one.

Again, the divine *justice* should never cease to appear to us as sealed and laden with mercy, and *mercy* as penetrated through and through with justice. These words justice and mercy are not mutually exclusive but each merely signifies a preponderant, a dominant aspect: "Certain works are attributed to justice and certain others to mercy, because in some justice appears more forcibly and in others mercy. Even in the damnation of the reprobate mercy is seen, which, though it does not totally remit, yet somewhat alleviates, in punishing short of what is deserved. In the justification of the ungodly justice is seen, when God remits sin on account of love, though He Himself has mercifully infused that love. So we read of Magdalen (Luke vii. 47): 'Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much'." <sup>18</sup>

The non-synonymy of the divine names and their mysterious compenetration—both these truths must be borne in mind. Because they are not synonymous, it becomes impossible for us to be content with any single one of them, even with the name Being or the name Light or the name Love. We cannot forgo multiplying the divine names. Because of their mutual

compenetration, it becomes impossible for us to conceive any single one of them without at the same time striving to keep that name under the active influence of all the others.

Thus, gathering together the most beautiful names, we must cast them all down before God: "What art Thou then, my God? . . . Most high, most good, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful, yet most just; most hidden, yet most present; most beautiful, yet most strong; stable, yet incomprehensible; unchangeable, yet all-changing; never new, never old; all-renewing. . . . Ever working, ever at rest; gathering all things to Thee, yet lacking nothing. . . ." <sup>19</sup>

## 6. BEYOND AGNOSTICISM

The divine names which inspired Scripture uses, therefore, do not all have the same significative value. Some designate "mixed perfections" and are said of God metaphorically; others designate "absolute perfections" and are said of Him properly,<sup>20</sup> in order to signify either the free and gratuitous outpouring of His riches upon the universe (God is truly our Creator, our Lord, our Father), or His absolute and eternal interior generosity (God is truly infinite existence, infinite purity, infinite goodness). But in this life God is never signified otherwise than as transcending by His absolute simplicity all our concepts; and in this sense, but only in this sense, is He conceived as ineffable, named as unnameable, known as unknown.

In opposition to the anthropomorphism of his

co-religionists, victims of biblical literalism, Maimonides (1135–1204)<sup>21</sup> in *The Guide for the Perplexed* propounds a doctrine of the divine transcendence which, at least in its conceptualization, topples over into agnosticism.

For us, God is named as unnameable, known as unknown, in this sense: that infinite wisdom and infinite existence, far from fading into nothingness in crossing the threshold of the divine mystery, are on the contrary preserved there intact, like the seven colours in white light, being raised to a degree of incandescence that remains unknowable and inexpressible.

For Maimonides, God is named as unnameable, known as unknown, in this sense: that our term *wisdom*, for example, does not apply properly to God. Thus, according to Maimonides, the statement *God is wise* signifies either that He is the *cause* of wisdom or that He is *not non-wise*. Similarly, it must be said (and Maimonides in fact goes this far) that our term *existence* does not apply properly to God, and that the proposition *God exists* merely signifies either that He is the cause of existence or that His “non-existence is impossible”.<sup>22</sup> But in that case the principle of non-contradiction itself no longer applies to God but vanishes in thin air. Whatever Maimonides may have *written*, if he *conceived* the divine transcendence, he conceived it in the Thomist sense.<sup>23</sup>

To say the Absolute is *beyond being, beyond thought, beyond happiness*, may mean that being, thought, and happiness, far from disappearing in the Absolute, are *taken up* into It, to be maintained there in so perfect a state of purity and actuality that they become identified

in Its incomprehensible and ineffable simplicity. Such is the Thomist doctrine of "analogy".

The foregoing statement may also mean that being, thought, happiness *vanish* before the Absolute, are found in It only virtually or causally, designating It only indirectly as an unutterable Highest. If the Sankarian doctrine of "indirect expression" be understood in this manner, we should have to return to Buddhist agnosticism, to the "void" of Nirvana, though the whole effort of the acosmic metaphysics of Sankara is one long protest against this. At any rate we may say that the doctrine of "indirect expression" is a much too imperfect logical instrument to enable us to distinguish between agnostic ineffability, resulting from a kind of abdication of the absolute perfections, and Thomist ineffability, resulting from their super-intensification.<sup>24</sup>

As for Ramanuja, he "stops midway between the total reabsorption of the divine attributes into the substance and their total assumption into the pure act", that is to say, between the doctrine of the "indirect expression" and the doctrine of "analogy".

"Too certain of the unbreakable unity of being under the aspect of *subject* or *substance*, Ramanuja did not shrink from attributing to the diverse as such a kind of sovereignty in the order of essence, which order in God is actually (and not merely according to our mode of conceiving) the realization of the radical capacities of the substance in a plurality of attributes distinct from one another and from their very source."<sup>25</sup>

Once more, it is entirely possible that the profound intuition which Sankara, Ramanuja, Maimonides, had of the Absolute was correct in what it meant to affirm, or rather, in Bergsonian language, in what it meant to deny; but the conceptualization they have given it is inadequate.

## 7. THE DIVINE VALUE OF CONCEPTS

What we first apprehended in the light of revelation and faith are indeed the words of our human language; but with the authentic *meaning* which must be restored to each of them that they may without error link our intellect to the divine Reality, which overreaches all our words and all our concepts. The tide of faith, in fact, casts us upon this divine Reality; by faith we adhere interiorly to the conceptual enunciations revealed by the prophets.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the work of our intellect, seeking in the divine Light to uncover the authentic conceptual meaning hidden beneath the words of the biblical revelation, is not sterile or distorting, nor do the derogatory epithets "scholastic" or "euclidean" apply to it. Here is no reprobate labour, but a task demanded and blessed by God.

Indeed, if it be granted that divine truth is addressed to men and comes from above to confront their ignorance and their strayings, is it conceivable that this Truth would not proffer Itself and invest with Its sovereign influences the processes of the conceptual intelligence destined to receive it? Is it possible that a

God Who deigns to enlighten us concerning His greatness and His goodness by the words of His prophets and of His own Son, should not thereby sanctify, the first gift He has bestowed upon us, the gift of our conceptual intelligence ?

In other words, divine revelation does not entail any disparagement of human reason. No doubt it conflicts with the precipitate movements of that reason and with its errors; it crushes its pride and its presumptions; it cauterizes our reason's wounds with a red-hot iron; it supplies knowledge where there was ignorance; it "destroys reasonings—yes, of every lofty thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every mind into captivity to the obedience of Christ . . ." (2 Cor. x. 5). But it does not lay waste our intellect; it sets it free. That it may sanctify and on the last day exalt our intellect, divine revelation lays bare the depths of purity which reason retains from its very creation and which in fact constitute its proper essence: the primal image or resemblance of God in man.<sup>27</sup>

The approbation given the human soul so considered, the consecration conferred upon it by divine revelation, which enlists the soul into the service of Itself and takes possession of it, represents an original gift from the treasury of revelation. We never forget this.<sup>28</sup>

The apprehension of this truth will be a heartrending experience. Allow me to cite a page where one of the best disciples of Bergson relates the gist of the spiritual drama that afflicted him and cast him, vanquished, at the foot of the Cross. "In 1908, while living in the

country near Heidelberg, we were deliberating whether we could reconcile Bergson's critique of the concept with the formulas of revealed dogma. It was at that time that the irreducible conflict between the *conceptual* pronouncements of theological faith, which had recently opened our eyes, and Bergson's philosophical doctrine (to which we were passionately devoted during our student days and to which we owed our deliverance from the materialist idols) appeared to us as one of those very certain facts that the soul, even though it has scarcely begun to acknowledge them, knows immediately it will never escape. The effort, pursued obscurely during the months, to effect the reconciliation we so greatly desired, ended suddenly with our recognition of the inescapable fact above described. A choice was imperative. Clearly, one could choose only the Infallible, thereby acknowledging that all the philosophical work one had delighted in had to be begun anew.

“ In concepts and conceptual propositions (which come to us dripping with the blood of martyrs—in the days of Arianism death was suffered for an iota), God offers us truths in the highest degree transcendent and inaccessible to our minds; indeed He offers us the very truth of His divine life, His own unfathomable depths of Truth. It is for this reason that the concept is not a mere practical instrument, incapable in itself of transmitting the real to our minds; an instrument designed for artificially parcelling our inexpressible continuities; an instrument which allows the Absolute to escape, like water through a net. Thanks to analogical intellection—that natural wonder of strength and agility which

moves nimbly from this side to that and renders our knowledge capable of the infinite—the concept, divinely elaborated in the dogmatic formula, contains without limiting and makes enter into us (enigmatically and as in a mirror yet also in all truth) the very mystery of the Godhead, Which proclaims Itself eternally in the uncreated Word and is recounted to us in time and in human language by the Word Incarnate. . . . All this we have learned in a manner too certain ever to forget. One may try all the half-way measures one likes; verbal adjustments, diplomatic compromises, are always obtainable. But those who have known real antinomy will not be satisfied with that sort of thing. At this period we had not yet made acquaintance with St. Thomas. It was upon the indestructible truth of the objects presented by faith that our philosophic reflection was based, so that the natural order itself of the intellect might be re-established in *being* and the ontological import of the work of reason acknowledged.”<sup>29</sup>

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. “. . . even according to our very imperfect mode of knowing, the divine perfections must be conceived not as extrinsic to one another but as *actually* included in one another in an *implicit* way, though each is not *explicitly* included in the others . . .” R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *God: His Existence and His Nature*, vol. II, p. 8.

2. This holds in the case of being as well as of all the other perfections. For, as St. Thomas explains in a celebrated article, if the concept of being contains implicitly all the other perfections—which can only be modes of being—it nevertheless does not succeed in designating them explicitly, “so that they add something to being inasmuch as they express a mode of



being which is not expressed by the word being itself". *De Ver.* I, 1.

Because of its comprehensive meaning, however, the concept of being appears, under a certain aspect, as the concept specially privileged to signify the mystery of the divine essence: "The names wisdom, virtue, goodness," St. Thomas says elsewhere (*De Pot.* VII, 5), "do signify the divine substance, but imperfectly and without being able to circumscribe It. Whence it follows that He Who Is is the name which most properly belongs to God, since it is the name which does not assign a particular perfection to God but signifies being indeterminately. And this is why Damascene says that He Who Is is a name designating the infinite ocean of substance." Likewise St. Thomas teaches (ST. I, 13, 11) that He Who Is is the name *par excellence* which is proper to God: (1) because it designates directly, not a *mode* of being but *being*; (2) because it is in consequence more universal [than His other names]—containing all things in Himself, God is as it were the infinite and limitless ocean of substance, says St. John Damascene; (3) because this name designates God as actual; it is a verbal, an existential name. (See above, pp. 34–35.) (St. John Damascene was born in Damascus about 676 and died between 754 and 787. He was enrolled among the doctors of the Church during the pontificate of Leo XIII.—*Translator.*)

3. ST. I, 13, 5. In a sense there is nothing that we can in this life truly "comprehend", that we can know in an exhaustive way: we understand that two and two make four but we do not exhaust the intelligibility of this property of numbers.—Wisdom, predicated directly of man or analogically of the angel, however, is signified as not transcending the direct or the analogical concept we form of it, as not absorbing into itself anything other than what it designates, as not going beyond its own proper concept in order to identify itself with the other perfections in a higher and an indivisible essence. But on the other hand, when wisdom is predicated of God, it is signified as uncircumscribed. Cf. Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 272–273.

4. ST. I, 13, 6.

5. Cajetan, *In I Sum. Theol.*, 39, 1, n. vii; and 13, 5, n. vii. "St. Thomas writes against the Platonists (*Comment. in lib. de Causis*, lect. 6): 'The first cause is above being inasmuch as it

is the infinite being'; *the infinite being* infinitely transcends in itself what would be the *idea* of being on the impossible hypothesis that the latter subsisted according to the Platonic conception. . . . God is subsistent Goodness as He is subsistent Truth and subsistent Being itself, but the Idea of Goodness, of Truth and of Being, if it subsisted in a pure state, would not be God." Maritain, *Degrees*, p. 280, note 2, and p. 17.

6. Maritain, *Degrees*, pp. 281–282. "A formula of endothermic reaction which the chemist quietly writes on a sheet of paper and arranges with his pen announces a vertiginous conflagration; in saying *Subsistent Being itself*, or *in Him there is no real distinction between essence and existence*, the metaphysician unwittingly describes that sacred abyss before which the angels fall trembling with love and terror" (ibid., p. 284). Our concepts "avow their impotence to enclose or delimit the Reality they designate. . . . They can only make God known in falling on their knees before Him" (ibid., p. 277).

7. *De Pot.* VII, 5, ad. 13.

8. Ibid., ad. 14.

9. St. Thomas, *In Boet. de Trin.* I, 2, ad. 1. One must add *in Himself*, for St. Thomas says further on: "Of no thing do we know *that it is* without knowing in some way, whether by perfect or at least by confused knowledge, *what it is*; so that respecting God and other immaterial substances, we should be unable to know *that* they are if at the same time we did not know confusedly *what* they are" (ibid., q. 6, a. 3). Cf. Maritain, *Degrees*, pp. 282–283, and in the French edition, Paris, 1932, pp. 827 ff.

10. ST. I, 4, 1, ad. 1. See below, pp. 70 ff.

11. Etymologically the word *God* is only a *common* name (see above, p. 2); or, when, as in St. Anselm, it signifies "that than which no greater can be conceived", it is only a comparative name, designating a limit, a name designed to evoke the ineffable divine essence; or finally, according to St. Thomas (ST. I, 13, 8), it signifies providential *action* primarily, being subsequently used to designate indirectly the divine nature *Itself*. To designate God by a name incommunicable in its own right, it would be necessary to invent a word or a sign which represented Him as a unique supposit, concretely existing and incommunicable. Such, according to St. Thomas (ST. I, 13, 9; I, 13, 11, ad. 1), is

the expression "I am He Who Is", and the sign of the Tetragrammaton. (The group of four letters representing the ineffably holy name—Jehovah—of the Supreme Being in Hebrew texts, consisting of the four consonants JHVH, JHWH, YHVH or YHWH.—*Translator*.)

Though Pure Act, like the term Being-from-Itself, is only a partial name, the Thomists use it in order to exclude all potentiality, all incompleteness, all imperfections, from the divine essence. It goes without saying that no one is bound to follow Berdyaev in making a "euclidean" notion of Pure Act, the better to rage against it. *Pure Act is pure mystery, but a mystery of fulness not of emptiness, of perfection not of imperfection.*

12. St. Thomas, *In Diony. De Divinis Nomnibus*, cap. 1, lect. 3; cited by Maritain, *Degrees*, p. 1. Speaking of metaphysics, Maritain says in the same place: "It is true that it utters the name of God. But it does not know His name. For we cannot describe God like a tree or a conic section. Truly thou art a hidden God, Thou the true God, the saviour of Israel!"

13. For the Judaic custom of not pronouncing the divine name, we are clearly seeking a justification more absolute than that which would be satisfied with seeing in it only a preoccupation with the esoteric, or only the desire to hide from the profane the syllables of a word having the power of magic.

On the folklore connected with this last point, see, for example, Emile Dermenghem, *Vies des saints musulmans*, Algiers, 1942, pp. 25-29. Apropos of respect for the divine name, this book contains the following charming anecdote: "One evening when Bichr the beggar was wandering about completely drunk, he found lying on the ground, trampled down by the feet of many passers-by, a piece of paper on which was written: 'In the name of God, the forgiving, the merciful. . . .' Picking up the paper, he wrapped it in a bit of cloth with a little piece of musk and deposited it in the cranny of an old wall. The same night, a pious personage of the town had a dream in which he was ordered to go say to Bichr these words: 'Since you have picked up Our name which lay on the ground, cleaned it off and scented it, We too, We shall honour your name in this world and in the next'" (p. 86).

Regarding the ban on the proper name of God, Père Lagrange writes in *Le judaïsme avant Jésus-Christ* (Paris, 1931, p. 459):

"It was not primarily because the Jews feared that the Gentiles might make a magical use of the sacred name that they forbade themselves to use it, but rather because the Jews considered this name a formidable mystery which the pagans loved to employ in their magical rites. In ancient times the sacred name was the common patrimony of the Israelites; it was not at all forbidden to them. On the contrary they pronounced it with love in the effusions of piety. The reserve, characteristic of Hellenistic times, implies that many Israelites had become too secularized to use the sacred name. . . . Is this not one more indication, as regards religious feeling, of a kind of rupture between Israel and Its God, which, though doubtless only provisional, nevertheless caused heads to be bent in fear and frightened love away?"

Again we must side with Pascal: "The Jews loved symbolic things so much and attended to them so closely that they failed to recognize Reality when it appeared in the time and the manner foretold" (*Pensées*, no. 669).

14. CG. I, cap. 31. The text of Zachary (xiv. 9) is considered here in its highest and its eschatological significance.

15. Some theologians have thought that the faithful could even in *this life* give God His own proper name. Others, on the contrary, have denied that the elect and the angels could, *even in heaven*, give God the name which manifests Him as He is in Himself. Both these opinions are extreme. Cf. J. B. Gonet, O.P., *De nominibus Dei*, Clypeus, Paris, 1875, vol. I, p. 313.

16. ST. I, 13, 4. The profound reason for the non-synonymous character of the divine names is given by St. Thomas in one sentence: "The name signifies the reality only by means of the concept of the intelligence" (*ibid.*, ad. 1). This applies to being, which is the first of the divine names, as well as to the other names : wisdom, goodness, etc.

17. Above, p. 42, note 2.

18. ST. I, 21, 4, ad. 1. When St. Paul writes to the Romans (i. 18), "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those men who in wickedness hold back the truth of God", we might, we must, say (while of course recognizing that the word wrath is a metaphor, an anthropomorphism) that the *wrath* of God is identical with His *love*. But in so saying we have only begun to come to the point. We must go a step farther and say that the wrath of

God is God's love *unrecognized*, whereas His benevolence or His grace is His love *recognized*. Otherwise we have only passed from anthropomorphism to agnosticism, from the vacuous to the vacuous.

19. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, I. ch. iv. n. 4. When piety deepens, the contrasting divine attributes are reflected integrally in the heart of the believer. Thus in an Hasidic text we read: "Believe me, Rabbi Moses, when at midnight we mourn in deep sadness and the tears stream from our eyes, in spite of all, we mourn in joy. Such is the true disposition of the Hasidim: to weep and to laugh all at once like children." (P. de Menasce, *Quand Israel aime Dieu*, Paris, 1931, p. 96.)

20. Failure to make this distinction will result either in considering all the divine names as *proper* names or in considering them all as *metaphorical*. Auguste Sabatier reduces everything to metaphor. For him, religious knowledge, being by nature symbolical, could only express "the way in which the subject feels affected by God." (*Esquisse d'une philosophie de la religion*, 9th ed., p. 394.) A. Gretillat, on the other hand, gives everything a rigorous meaning; for him, God is said to be equal to Himself in the sense that "He experiences only those changes which He Himself has willed as real or possible. . . . Far from being hostile to the divine immutability, the opposing alternatives of affection which arise in the divine Being—whether He pass from anger to love or from love to anger—are themselves demanded by that very immutability, which stands opposed only to the mutability of man; and when man alters his relations with God, if God did not alter His relations with man, it would be God Who would change." (*Exposé de théologie systématique*, Neuchâtel, 1885–1899, vol. I, pp. 230–231.)

21. Moses Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon) was the greatest Jewish theologian of the Middle Ages.—*Translator*.

22. *Guide*, trans. Friedländer, 1936, Part I, ch. 58, p. 82. Cf. M. T.-L. Penido, *La rôle de l'analogie en théologie dogmatique*, p. 140, note 2.

23. That he did actually conceive it is the opinion of Père de Menasce, who attributes to "insufficient philosophic and theological study the strange [Jewish] errors which have made it possible to view Maimonides as an agnostic, because he failed to grasp the nature of the analogical knowledge of the divine

perfections, or to make pantheists of the Hasidim, because, being ignorant of created grace, they spoke of the effects of God as though they were God Himself" (*Quand Israël aime Dieu*, p. 19).

24. According to Sankara, "direct expression" enables us to know directly particular objects whose genus we are cognizant of, in distinguishing them from other individuals or species of the same genus; for example, the red lotus or the blue lotus. "Indirect expression" is designed to disclose those things of which our mind, being finite, possesses no direct measure; it points them out to us not only by distinguishing them from everything else but also by stressing the analogies with other things which they present. Thus the proposition, *Brahman is Reality, Knowledge, Infinity*, signifies by indirect expression what Brahman is: "As knowledge, Brahman is not what the word knowledge expresses directly; nevertheless, as knowledge, he is signified indirectly by the word knowledge, whose object is an attribute of the finite intellect and which expresses properly a finite reflection of that infinite knowledge. . . . The same applies to the word *reality*. Since the proper form of Brahman is measured only by its rejection of particularization, the word reality, whose common object is the being of exterior things, has but an indirect signification when it is said that Brahman is reality; for Brahman is not what the word reality directly expresses. Being in juxtaposition to one another, the words reality, knowledge, infinity, are subject to one another's control, and they do in fact control one another reciprocally. Thereby they have the effect of distinguishing Brahman from everything that each of them signifies directly, and of signifying him indirectly. Consequently it is an established fact that Brahman is ineffable. . . ." From this text of Sankara (borrowed from O. Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedânta*, p. 82), it clearly seems to follow: (1) that the notion of analogy is still very confused and is not brought out with sufficient precision; (2) that notions like those of being and knowledge, which do express absolute perfections, would not be applicable *properly* to the Absolute; (3) that these same notions would not have a *higher degree of truth* when predicated of God than when predicated of creatures.

25. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 95, 96. What seems lacking in Ramanuja is a true doctrine of the signification of the divine names. The

distinguishing of the different divine attributes *is* the work of *human reason*; but it is *justified* by the supereminent richness of the *divine reality*. (See above, p. 26, note 29.)

26. That which falls under faith has, on the one hand, the character of *means*; such are the enunciations of revelation—those of Scripture and of the Symbol of the Apostles, for example; and, on the other hand, the character of an *end*, namely the reality those enunciations signify. “The act of the believer,” St. Thomas observes (ST. II-II, 1, 2, ad. 2), “does not terminate in the [revealed] statement but in the [revealed] reality; our statements have indeed no other end, whether it be a question of science or of faith, than to convey to us knowledge of *things*.”

27. “Because it is created in the image of God, the human soul can become capable of God by grace.” St. Thomas, ST. I-II, 113, 10.

28. To require believers to accept the revealed words rather than their meanings, would only force them into verbalism. (This method of instruction has been extolled by certain doctors of the Mohammedan religion. See below, p. 67, note 11.) Moreover, to proceed thus would be to admit that revelation might violate the fundamental law of reason, namely the principle of non-contradiction, and eventually offer us assertions actually contradictory.

29. Maritain, *La philosophie bergsonienne*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1930, p. xiv.

### CHAPTER THREE

## THE EXCELLENCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF FAITH IN RELATION TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF REASON

### 1. THE REAL, THOUGH NOT IMMEDIATELY REDEMP- TIVE, VALUE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY IS CONFIRMED BY REVELATION

REGARDING this question of the divine names with which we are concerned, let us ask, with a view to resolving the problem raised by the existence of the universe, what knowledge human reason can attain by its natural powers, employing its own proper methods of investigation.

For us Catholics it is a primal certitude of divine faith that so long as human reason is not transfigured by the completely gratuitous illuminations of faith, it is powerless to enable us to cross the threshold of the Kingdom of Heaven; that human reason cannot be the cause of our knowing God with the power and the depth absolutely required for the soul's justification, whenever and wherever that justification may be effected. "Without faith it is impossible to please God. For he who comes to God must believe that God exists and is a rewarder of those who seek him" (Heb. xi. 6). Let us admit further that the true Light that has come into the world is offered to us, in a manner



hidden or manifest: the Light that “enlightens every man” (John i. 9), God our Saviour “Who wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. ii. 4).

The ox, however, “knows its owner and the ass its master’s stable” (Isa. i. 3): yet, even disregarding the lights of faith surrounding it on all sides,<sup>1</sup> is not the human creature precisely because it is human, though wounded by sin, capable of knowing its Creator at least indistinctly? From our visible world, can it not even imperfectly pass to its invisible Author, in order to acknowledge His power, His eternity, His divinity?

To the question thus proposed, Catholic teaching replies by citing the words of St. Paul concerning the Gentiles: “*What may be known about God is manifest to them. For God has manifested it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen—His everlasting power also and divinity—being understood through the things that are made. And so they are without excuse, seeing that, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but became vain in their reasonings, and their senseless minds have been darkened. For while professing to be wise, they have become fools, and they have changed the glory of the incorruptible God for an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things*” (Rom. i. 19–23).

This text should be compared with an antecedent passage in the Book of Wisdom<sup>2</sup> (xiii. 1–5): “*All men are vain in whom there is not the knowledge of God,*

*and who by these good things that are seen could not understand Him that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman; but have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the world. . . . For by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the Creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby."*

This God, St. Paul says further, is nevertheless "not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28);<sup>3</sup> and though "In the generations that are past He let all nations follow their own ways . . . yet He did not leave Himself without testimony, bestowing blessings, giving rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts xiv. 15-16).

Resting on the very words of St. Paul, therefore, and thus giving a supernatural sanction to an intuition which is at once that of spontaneous intelligence and of the profoundest philosophers, the teaching Church at the time of the Vatican Council (Dec. 8, 1869-Oct. 20, 1870—*Tr.*) had to solemnly define that "The one true God, our Creator and our Lord, can be known with certitude from His effects by the natural light of human reason".<sup>4</sup>

Far from wishing to abase the creature in the act whereby it seeks to know its Creator, faith encourages the creature to appreciate the grandeur of a step which normally tends to terminate in the outpouring of adoration.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. THE REJECTION OF NATURAL THEOLOGY BY THE REFORMATION

“He who claims to acquire intellectual knowledge of the invisible realities of God from His works is not worthy of the name theologian,” writes Luther, “for the Apostle calls such people fools.”<sup>6</sup> The proper work of the theologian, Luther says, is to know God by His passion and His cross; and he cites here 1 Cor. i. 21: “Since, in God’s wisdom, the world did not come to know God by ‘wisdom’, it pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching, to save those who believe.”

In the first place, however, it must be said that true theology must know at once both the Creator in His creatures and the Saviour in His Passion. In the second place, St. Paul calls the Gentiles fools not at all because they knew God in His works, but because they did not honour Him. Finally, the “folly” of the redemption, following upon the “wisdom” of the preceding economy under which salvation had been offered the Jews and the Gentiles, has not obliterated the signs of the Creator’s presence in the heart of the universe and of each and every atom of being.

Calvin writes more subtly: “Vain, therefore, is the light afforded us in the formation of the world to illustrate the glory of its Author, which, though its rays be diffused all around us, is *insufficient to conduct us into the right way*. . . .” Although “the invisible Deity was represented by such visible objects, yet . . . *we have no eyes to discern Him, unless they be illuminated*

*through faith by an internal revelation of God.* Nor does St. Paul, where he observes that ‘that which may be known of God is manifest’ (Rom. i. 19) in the creation of the world, mean such a manifestation as human sagacity may comprehend; but rather shows that *its utmost extent is to render men inexcusable*. . . . But men are chargeable with sinfully corrupting the seeds of divine knowledge, which, by the wonderful operation of nature, are sown in their hearts, so that *they produce no good and fair crop*. . . .”<sup>7</sup>

If in rejecting the knowledge that reason can have of God, Luther and Calvin simply meant to affirm *the incapacity of this knowledge to justify us*, their doctrine would be identical with that of Catholic teaching, which expressly condemns the assertion that “faith, understood in the broad sense and produced (in us) by the witness of creatures, or by some similar cause, would suffice for justification”.<sup>8</sup> In the same sense Pascal writes: “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants.”

But it is more than this that Luther and Calvin claim (and herein lies the innovation); they claim that fallen reason is totally incompetent in the face of questions concerning God and the future life.<sup>9</sup> For them, the knowledge of the Creator which reason can attain is not a knowledge speculatively true and ethically good, whose principles could be utilized, elevated, illumined ultimately by grace.

The argument between us and the Reformation here bears on four main points: (1) Can reason attain to a true knowledge of God, the soul, natural law, even

though such knowledge is *insufficient for justification and for salvation*? In other words, is there, besides the new and incomparably higher necessity of *Christian* salvation, a level of truth, morality, and justice, whereon there exists an overruling necessity for men to understand one another and to be united, simply because they are *men*? The Reformation said *no*; <sup>10</sup> we say *yes*.

(2) Are the influences of Christian grace exerted on the level of truth, morality, and law, in order to assist the work of reason, so that in a sense one could speak of a Christian philosophy, a Christian politics, a Christian sociology, a Christian law? The Reformation said *no*; we say *yes*.

(3) If, with the Reformation, one holds that the procedure of human expression (by concepts and judgments derived from the order of nature and of creation) must be regarded as perverted intrinsically once it is applied to the knowledge of being and of the Cause of being, it will become rather difficult to maintain for long that this same procedure may have a speculative and an absolute, and not a purely utilitarian and pragmatic, truth-value, when it is adopted by the revealed Light (which derives from the redemptive order) to enable us to know the depths of the mystery of God by means of exact formulas. (Today, for example, there are not a few Protestants who hail Karl Barth as a prophet yet refuse to follow him in believing in the dogma of the Trinity and of the divinity of Christ.)

(4) In that case, moreover, it will be impossible to

admit that a minor premise of reason can serve to disclose the latent content of a revealed major; or, in other words, to admit that from a revealed major one can deduce a conclusion whose content is homogeneous in itself, *quoad se*, with that of the revealed major. (For us, *etiam quoad nos*, it would be homogeneous only after an infallible definition of the teaching Authority.) Speculative theology will then cease to exist. For instance, one could *no longer say*: the divine nature is unique; but generation implies duality; hence the divine nature neither begets nor is it begotten. Or again: the Son is begotten; but not all generation entails a transition from non-being to being; hence Arius was wrong in holding that "there was a time when the Son was not".

This controversy therefore concerns the possibility: (1) of a philosophy which is true by nature, (2) of a philosophy which in its actual status is Christian, (3) of the speculative import of revealed pronouncements and of dogma, (4) of a speculative theology.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. REDEMPTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIVINE NAMES BY THE LIGHT OF FAITH

Human reason can attain true knowledge of the invisible Orderer of the universe, His power, His eternity, His divinity.<sup>12</sup> It can say with truth that He is, and that He rewards those who seek Him; that He is powerful, good, wise. . . . This knowledge alone might have sufficed to enlighten man's journey towards his last end—if man had been created in the state of pure

nature and if he had been destined for a truly human mode of happiness.

But from the beginning man has been invited by God Himself to participate, in an unprecedented way, in happiness that is truly divine. Man has been created, not that he may become what he is by nature, namely a man, but that he may become, by grace, what he could never be by nature: a sharer in the divine nature Itself. And from the very beginning of his existence, the rays from the light of truth and of grace never cease beating in a thousand ways upon the doors and windows of his soul, that he may be prepared for this sublime destiny.

If man obstinately and in practice rejects this mysterious light, if in the bottom of his heart he deliberately extinguishes it, if he prefers his egoism and his passions to it, then the natural knowledge of God (while in itself always good and true) will begin to grow dim in him, and it will not save him, even though he should continue to cling to it; it will not save him any more than it saves the evil angels. In Pascalian language, one might then tell him that he will lose his soul as an upright man, but that it is always great folly to lose one's soul.

If in the privacy of his heart he opens his mind to this divine light, then his intellect, rising above the waves of the sea of natural life, will enter into the unforeseeable liberty of an other life. In this new world faith will employ concepts and judgments. It will say once more that God exists and rewards those who seek Him; that He is mighty, good, wise. . . . But these affirmations will then be like pearls laid out in the sun; a light

unknown to metaphysics will shine upon them; their meaning will be transformed. The man of divine faith will cling to God with such power, in the heart of the divine night he will touch a centre of such profundity that, believing *God is*, he will already by anticipation believe implicitly all that the subsequent revelation of the mystery of the Holy Spirit will some day disclose to him. Likewise, in believing that *God is the rewarder* of those who seek Him, he will already believe, by anticipation and in darkness, all that the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation will later make manifest to him.

When Abraham hears Jehovah call him from the heavens and say to him: "I am the Almighty God", and Abraham falls flat on his face (Gen. xvii. 1, 3); when Moses hears Jehovah answer him: "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob", and Moses hides his face for fear of gazing upon God (Exod. iii. 6)—the faith which thus humbles them so completely banishes the inner resistance of their minds that henceforth they are disposed to accept as a matter of course the explicit revelation of the mysteries of the Trinity and of the redemptive Incarnation.<sup>13</sup>

In proclaiming that to come near to God one must "believe that He exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. xi. 6), the Epistle to the Hebrews aims to teach that the light—one might say, the magic—of faith is offered to all men; that, bringing conceptual judgments such as "God is", "God is a rewarder", within the field of its own influence, faith confers upon them a truth-value so sublime that they at once disclose



the last refuge of the divine existence, which is the Trinity, and of the divine providence, which is the redemptive Incarnation. (St. Paul extols the light of faith throughout Chapter XI of this Epistle.<sup>14</sup>) Thus faith is the only knowledge that can effectively give light to fallen man on his journey towards his actual end, which is supernatural; the only knowledge true in a manner high enough, pure enough, complete enough, to be immediately redemptive.

#### 4. IN THE MYSTERY OF UNITY, FAITH ALREADY PRESSES CLOSE TO THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

The names of the divine perfections: being, wisdom, goodness, providence, justice, mercy . . . can therefore designate the mystery of the Godhead, Wherein these perfections are one: at first, from afar and as it were unconsciously, when they are enunciated in the light of metaphysics alone, which touches neither trinitarian life nor redeeming love; and then close by and in "divination", when they are uttered in the light of faith which knows, implicitly or explicitly yet always in darkness, that they signify the very Life of the Trinity and Its redeeming Love for all men:

*That everlasting fountain is a secret well,  
And I know well its home,  
Though of the night.*<sup>15</sup>

In passing from the knowledge of God's existence and His attributes (simplicity, perfection, goodness, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, unity,

wisdom, love, justice, providence), considered in the light of natural reason, to the knowledge of His trinitarian life and His redeeming love; more briefly, in passing from the metaphysical treatise *De Deo uno* to the theological treatises *De Deo trino* and *De Deo incarnato*, we ascend to an infinitely higher level. It is, however, the same unique mystery of Deity that is known in each case. But in the first instance God is known without knowing wherein the core of His Being lies; He is known blindly, *materially*, just as in perceiving a man approaching afar off and recognizing him to be my friend Peter, I am thereby knowing him materially and not as he actually is in himself; whereas in the second instance, I know God *formally*, "in a night more lovely than the dawn".<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, in passing from the knowledge of God's existence and His attributes (simplicity, perfection, goodness, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, unity, wisdom, love, justice, mercy, providence)—this time considered in the light of faith—to the knowledge of His trinitarian life and His redeeming love; in short, in passing from the theological treatise *De Deo uno* to the theological treatises *De Deo trino* and *De Deo incarnato et redemptore*, there is no variation in level; for in both cases the unique mystery of the Godhead is assumed to be attained directly and formally.

It is the whole trinitarian life which is simple, perfect, eternal, just, and merciful; it is, in short, the whole trinitarian life which exists intrinsically in and in its totality is present to, each of the divine attributes, infinitizing them by its own mystery, opening to them

the stillness of its own heaven. It is the whole trinitarian life which is creative and conservative of being, transcendent yet at the same time immanent to the universe, to the star, to the sparrow, to the grain of sand, to the rose. And since human reason functions in a Christian climate, it can doubtless already recognize a God Who is not only the Orderer but also the Creator of the world. Nevertheless, divine faith alone can know that it is impossible for this Creator *not* to be at the same time One and Three; and that it is impossible that His love of creatures could not some day, if He so wills, condescend even to the follies of the redemptive Incarnation. From the very first article of the Symbol of the Apostles, in saying "I believe in God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth",<sup>17</sup> the believer already intends to avow all these wonders.

## 5. METAPHYSICAL ANALOGY AND THE SUPERANALOGY OF FAITH

So, in the magic of faith's light, the same divine names which the philosopher comes to employ assume unsuspected dimensions; their content is deepened; their meaning becomes analogous to a new Power.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover in this same light of faith new names are given to God which no philosopher would have dared assign and before which all human reason is struck dumb: God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. From all eternity there is in Him a generation issuing from the Father and terminating in the Son, the Word; and a second procession issuing from the Father and the Son

and terminating in the Holy Ghost. Thus at the heart of the one divine nature are found two processions and three Persons. God becomes incarnate; He becomes our Head, our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Mediator, our Friend. Those are the unheard-of divine names which revelation alone can disclose to us. “ ‘ No one has at any time seen God. The only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him ’ (John i. 18). That the notions of generation and sonship, or of Three having One nature, or of a coming in the flesh and a personal union with the creature, that these could have a value in the order of Deity itself and in regard to the inward life of God, we should never in any way have known if God Himself had not revealed it.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus there are two levels of meaning, two strata of analogy, respecting which the divine names can designate the one divine mystery. The first stratum is reached by the divine names which the natural intelligence, whether spontaneous or philosophic, employs when it says for example that God exists, that He is thought, or love. Here we are on the level of *metaphysical analogy*. The second stratum is reached by the divine names which the humility of faith exalts even to the level of trinitarian life. Here we are confronted with *revealed analogy*, the superanalogy of faith.<sup>20</sup>

Thus is the notion of analogy itself analogical.

## 6. THE ALCHEMY OF FAITH

On the *cultural level*, some remote likeness of this alchemy of faith is seen in the fact, for instance, that the

words of human language receive a twofold depth of meaning: that given them by the man-in-the-street, and the revealing significance which the violence of passion or the illumination of poetry confer upon them.<sup>21</sup>

The names which *faith* transfigures, that it may make of them its own divine names, the names of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, will not be the ones which metaphysical intelligence exclusively employs. Faith will even use names which are exceedingly humble. "What is more earthly than a father and his son? What notion is more common, more heavy with human echoes, than that of buying back? Thus the superanalogy of faith is more humble than that of metaphysics; it wears the livery of poverty. But we know from God that it attains to divine secrets which metaphysics does not know. Once shown by revelation as likenesses to what is hidden in God, the mind perceives that paternity and filiation can be referred to the transcendental order, are *analogical by analogy of proper proportionality*. The names Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not metaphorical; they designate (but without containing or circumscribing) what the divine Persons formally and intrinsically are. Nor is the word *redemption* a metaphor, for it expresses that which the work accomplished by the Son intrinsically and formally is. Under the livery of poverty the superanalogy of faith hides a supernatural vigour; by it we attain in darkness to the Godhead Itself: the divine essence in an aspect wherein no creature can participate naturally, and as no created perfection can of itself manifest that Essence to our reason."<sup>22</sup>

Noteworthy also are the absolute liberty, the freshness, and the joy with which faith, when it is vital, knows how to make use of *metaphorical analogy*. To faith all of creation and the whole biblical story have become transparent. Faith lingers, it rejoices to read, to discover, to divine, at the heart of the lowliest things and the simplest facts, the signs, the invitations, the clear messages which come to it from the most hidden depths of Love. It is by this divine, never-failing Spring that the great poetry of an Augustine, a Bernard, a Francis of Assisi, a St. John of the Cross, is fed.

We may now deliberately leave that which falls within the scope of the natural knowledge of the divine names in its relation to the knowledge of faith, and enter upon an exceedingly important consideration of the twofold use which faith itself can make of these names.

### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. These illuminations of faith may draw the intelligence up to *their own higher level*, to which the intelligence is by nature absolutely incapable of raising itself; and it is thus that faith employs concepts and judgments, while transfiguring them. These illuminations may also let the intelligence remain *on its own level*, while healing its wounds, fortifying it, enlightening it from above so that it may there prove itself more fit and worthy: it is above all in this way that Christian philosophy is formed. Conceptual intelligence thus by turns enters into the domain of faith and the domain of *rational thought* (spontaneous or philosophical). In the first case the intelligence receives wings in order to fly; in the second case it receives wings in order to walk better.

2. This book (deutero-) canonical for us, is regarded as apocryphal in Protestantism.

3. In citing this text, the reading followed by St. Augustine

allowed him to write that St. Paul, in addressing the Gentiles, added: "Some of you have even said this." The holy doctor has just warned the Christian not to include all the philosophers under the same censure, since he understands the Apostle to tell him (Rom. i. 19-20): "That which can be known of God is manifest among them: God has manifested it to them. For the invisible things of God, etc. . . ." (*De civitate Dei*, VIII, ch. 9).

4. Denz. no. 1806. Cf. the declaration against the modernist errors: "I profess that God, the principle and the end of all things, can be known with certainty and therefore demonstrated, by taking our point of departure from the universe, that is to say, from the visible works of creation, as a cause is demonstrated by its effects" (Denz. no. 2145). Here we must transcribe the words of Jacques Maritain in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 277: "May I be permitted to point out what delicacy, what filial fear shines through that very word *paths* (*viae*) used by St. Thomas? (ST. I, 2, 2; *De Pot.* VII, 3; CG. I, 12 and III, 39.)

"They are proofs, demonstrations. But when our business is with things proportionate with or connatural to our intelligence, demonstration, while being entirely submissive to the object, also in a way subjects the object to our grasp, to our means of verification, which measure, which delimit, which define it. . . . And perhaps Scholastics . . . forget sometimes to what a point the terms of science, of demonstration, of proof, are charged with materiality in the use made of them by the moderns, ever since thought was directed above all towards the domination of sensible nature, so that 'verification' only evokes the idea of methods of measurement and the apparatus of a laboratory. In a just refusal of this degraded terminology Scholastics thus risk insufficiently explaining their own. But in any case they know that to demonstrate the existence of God is not to subject Him to our grasp, nor to define or lay hold on Him, nor to manipulate anything other than ideas which are inadequate to such an object, nor to judge anything except our rightful and radical dependence. The process by which reason demonstrates that God exists, places reason itself in an attitude of natural adoration and intellectual admiration."

5. That one cannot with *truth* give God any names other than those He Himself chooses—revealed names, is a thought which seems to come spontaneously to men's minds as soon as they

glimpse the profundity of God; and this thought is precisely true; it is even a thought of grace, if one has in mind the Truth which Itself *saves*.

This view is found in the doctors of the Vedanta, who regard Vedic scripture as divine, as authorless and as existing from all eternity; and for these men all reflection which is worthwhile, that is to say, which is capable of bringing deliverance from transmigration, must be a sacred science. Cf. G. Dandoy, *L'ontologie du Vedânta*, pp. 25-28.

The Vedantic doctors fully understood that reason does not falsify, does not "rationalize", but on the contrary safeguards the integrity of the revealed mystery, when it intervenes to give to the words of Scripture their true meanings. (They believed in the value of dogma.) And they did not hesitate to make use of reason in order to express the latent and virtual content of dogma. (They believed in the value of theology.) Sankara and Ramanoudja agree on this point.

Here the trust necessarily placed in reason may be withdrawn and all truth-value denied to reasoning about God as soon as reason ceases to depend on revelation in order to become philosophical. (At any rate there can no longer be any question of a truth other than a *non*-immediately redemptive one.) This is the position of Sankara, for whom metaphysics seems reduced to the rôle of an apologetic, and even more truly Ramanoudja's position. So on this point the doctrines of these two thinkers somewhat resemble those of the Reformation. Cf. O. Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedânta*, pp. 218-230, 297.

Distrust of philosophic reason may spring from the conviction that reason is proud: to which Catholic doctrine replies that its pride must be condemned but not its lights. Or this mistrust may be caused by the fear that reason may wish to take the place of faith: to which Catholic doctrine replies that it is impossible for rational knowledge, being of an inferior order and not immediately redemptive, to take the place of the knowledge of faith, which is of an infinitely higher order and is immediately redemptive.

6. Proposition XIX of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518; in Jena edition of Luther's Works, 1564, Vol. I, p. 30. (In April, 1518, the Augustinian monks of Heidelberg held a convention in their monastery in which Luther participated. In a public debate



he maintained forty theological and philosophical theses which upheld in part the uselessness of moral effort and the doctrine of justification by faith alone.—*Translator.*)

7. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Ch. V, n. 14 and 15; Philadelphia, 1936, Vol. I, pp. 77-79.

8. Denz. no. 1173.

9. Etienne Gilson, *Christianity and Philosophy*, trans. by Ralph Macdonald, C.S.B., Sheed and Ward, 1939, pp. 16-17.

10. It continues to say *no*, at least in part. The Geneva Bureau of the Ecumenical Council of Churches has recently pointed out the divers principles common to the Protestant churches and the divergences to which they give rise. Here is the fourth of these principles: "The church must proclaim the divine commandments bearing on the order that must reign in the world." And there are the two divergent interpretations of this principle: "Some think that when the church proclaims to the world the divine commandments concerning the political and social order, *she must appeal to the natural law* implicitly contained in God's creation, implanted in the conscience of man, knowable by reason and illumined by revelation. Others think that the church must proclaim *only the commandments she finds in the biblical revelation* and must confess that these can be truly obeyed only if the sovereignty of Christ is recognized." *La vie protestante*, Feb. 19, 1933. Italics mine.

11. The controversy which sets Karl Barth and Emil Brunner against one another is entirely confined to Protestantism: the Catholic position on the natural knowledge of God is misunderstood by both sides. Cf. J. Fehr, *Das Offenbarungsproblem in dialektischer und thomistischer Theologie*, Fribourg, 1939 pp. 19-40.

The mistrust of the conceptual process whereby reason goes beyond the *letter* in search of the *meaning* of divine revelation (the *qiyas*) is already found in certain doctors of the Moham-medan religion. According to Jafar ben Mohammed al Sadiq, it is Iblis, the devil, who introduces the discursive process of thought into the world when, instead of sticking to the letter of the revelation given him, he refuses to bow down before man, on the grounds that a being of light is nobler than an earthly being. (The reference, supplied by Père de Menasce, is in Goldziher, *Die Zahiriten*, p. 15.) So let us say that the devil's

sin was not to have reasoned but to have reasoned *badly* or *inadequately*.

12. As a matter of fact, the Greeks spoke profoundly of the *Demiurge*, but without rising up to the notion of a *Creator*: "the first principle of all being, as Plato and Aristotle conceived it, integrally explains indeed why the universe is *what it is*, but does not explain why it *exists* . . . Nothing could be more familiar than the first verse of the Bible: 'In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth' (Gen. i. 1). . . . In uttering so simply the secret of His creative action, it seems that God puts us in possession of one of those enigmatic keywords, which we knew all along must exist but could never discover for ourselves, and the truth of which comes home to us with irresistible force as soon as it is gratuitously given." Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. by A. H. C. Downes, New York, 1936, pp. 68-69.

13. ". . . all the articles [of faith] are contained implicitly in certain primary truths of faith, such as God's existence and His providence over the salvation of man. . . . For the *being* of God includes all that we believe to exist in God eternally, and in these our happiness consists, while belief in His *providence* includes all those things which God dispenses in time for man's salvation and which are the way to that happiness." St. Thomas, ST. II-II, 1, 7.

14. This passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews may be compared with the words of St. John (xvii. 3): "Now this is everlasting life, that we may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ."

15. "*Aquella eterna fonte està ascondida*

*Que bien sé yo do tiens su manida*

*Aunque es de noche.*"—St. John of the Cross. See *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by David Lewis, M.A., London, 1864, Vol. II, p. 415. (All subsequent references to St. John of the Cross are also found in this edition of *The Complete Works*.—Translator.)

16. "*Oh noche que guiaste*

*Oh noche amable màs que la alborada.*"—St. John of the Cross, in poem entitled "The Obscure Night of the Soul"; *Works*, Vol. II, p. 394.

17. According to Rom. i. 20, "His invisible attributes are clearly

seen . . . being understood through the things that are made"; and according to Hebrews xi. 1, faith is "the evidence of things that are not seen". One cannot therefore have faith in those *divine things* that one sees: a metaphysician, for instance, cannot *believe* what he *sees* of the Creator. But [as a metaphysician] he will never see that the Creator is necessarily the one triune God.

18. In Book IX of the *De civitate Dei*, Ch. 16, St. Augustine cites with joy part of the following passage, which is perhaps the most beautiful in Plotinus: "'Let us fly unto our dear fatherland !' But how shall we fly ? How escape from here ? . . . For we have one fatherland whence we have come and one Father who awaits us there" (I Enneads, Bk. VI, Ch. 8). Of course, the evangelical echoes of these words *father* and *fatherland* are what Augustine took to heart. But what meaning had they for Plotinus ? That of the pure Platonic reason ? Or were they, and perhaps the Platonic dialectic itself, already touched by the secret solicitations of divine grace ? It is quite possible that this "too beautiful witness given to eternal aspirations" gives rise to a "confusion", "in which deception will play a great part". Cf. Maritain, *Degrees*, p. 297.

19. Maritain, *ibid.*, p. 298.

20. In *metaphysical analogy*, our intellect ascends from contingent being to its divine Analogue. In the *superanalogy of revelation*, it is God Who comes down to us, making us understand that such concepts, proposed for our acceptance by faith, "are analogical signs of what is hidden in Him, and of which He makes use to speak of Himself to us in our language" (Maritain, *loc. cit.*). In the first case, God is known *materially*, being concealed in the radiations, as it were, of His creative activity; in the second case, He is known *formally*, for it is God Himself Who then tells us the secret of His own trinitarian life. But analogy obtains in both cases, because the knowledge we have of God must be mediated to us through concepts, which are patterned after created things. In the act of vision whereby God will be apprehended without the mediation of any concept, there will be no room for analogy.

21. According to Mallarmé, the poet will know how "*To give a purer sense to the words of the tribe*".

22. Maritain, *Degrees*, p. 299.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# FROM THE KNOWLEDGE THAT IS NESCIENCE TO THE NESCIENCE THAT IS KNOWLEDGE

## I. THE "KNOWLEDGE OF FAITH THAT LOVES" AND THE "NESCIENCE OF LOVE THAT BELIEVES"

ST. THOMAS points out that there are two ways of judging moral things: one by conceptual *knowledge*, the other by a kind of instinctive *inclination*. The first way is that of the moralist, who determines from principles what is good conduct in such and such a case and what is evil. The second is that of the virtuous man, who immediately knows what he should do.<sup>1</sup>

Corresponding to these two ways of judging moral matters there are two ways of knowing God in this life in the loving darkness of faith. It may be said that the first of these two types of knowledge (the type of which we have spoken thus far) proceeds according to *the law of faith that loves*; the second (which is rather a nescience than a knowledge), according to *the law of love that believes*. In both cases, conceptual enunciations are necessary; but their rôle is different.

## 2. THE KNOWLEDGE THAT KNOWS NOT

The first type of knowledge requires revealed conceptual enunciations as *means through which* that

knowledge is conveyed (*media quo*). It seeks those enunciations as a man who has lost his way seeks a good path in the mountains. It sheds light upon them every time it uses them, discovering in them 'instinctively' the superanalogical meanings which revelation has placed in them, thus opening the door to the deepest mystery of the divine Reality. This knowledge is expressed spontaneously by those conceptual enunciations; it is therefore primarily and naturally adapted to affirmative, "cataphatic" language. When it becomes negative or "apophatic", when it seems to wish to discard concepts, it is only under a secondary aspect, namely to protest that the restricted and imperfect mode of signification which concepts retain from the created realities whence they are derived must be denied of the divine realities. This knowledge is aided incomparably more by the positive content of those concepts than it is impeded by their limitations. It is therefore primarily and essentially affirmative, cataphatic, and secondarily negative, apophatic.

According to St. Thomas, it is into this framework of affirmative theology that the negations contained in the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Dionysius the pseudo-Areopagite (about A.D. 500) must be introduced. Dionysius held that it would be truer to deny than to affirm that God is good, wise, etc.; and St. Thomas explains that Dionysius means that *what* these words signify pertains to God *not* in their created mode of signification, but in a more eminent way; "and this is why Dionysius adds that God is above all substance and all life".<sup>2</sup> In a parallel but more complete text in

the *De Potentia Dei*<sup>3</sup> St. Thomas points out that when Dionysius says<sup>4</sup> that in divine things negations are true and affirmations unfitting, ἀναρμοστοι, he does not mean the latter are false but only are not perfectly apposite because of the different mode in which they signify created perfections and divine perfections.

In the same place, St. Thomas sets forth what today would be called the "dialectic" of affirmative or cataphatic theology: "According to the doctrine of Dionysius, the divine names are predicated in three ways: (1) affirmatively, as when we say *God is wise* (which we must say because God possesses in Himself the likeness of the wisdom He bestows upon other intelligent beings); (2) negatively, as when we say *God is not wise*, because wisdom, as we conceive it and name it, is not the wisdom that is in God (hence, in that [creaturely,] finite sense He is truly said *not* to be wise); (3) eminently, as when we say *God is super-wise*; for wisdom is not denied of God because He lacks it, but because wisdom exists in Him in a mode transcending all that can be said or conceived, and for this reason He must be called super-wise."

Such is the conceptual knowledge, the affirmative and cataphatic wisdom, essential to divine faith: it is a knowledge that knows not.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. THE NESCIENCE THAT KNOWS

There is another knowledge of God which, far from superseding the former type, rests upon it, that it may rise higher, like mists from the sea. Its Way, we may

remark, is not so much that of faith which loves as of love which believes. Above the bare wisdom of faith, it represents the wisdom of a faith intoxicated with love, “the wisdom that is a gift of the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul speaks of (1 Cor. ii. 15): ‘*the spiritual man judges all things, and he himself is judged by no man*’; and of which Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* ii): ‘Hierotheus is taught *not by mere learning, but by experience of divine things*’.”<sup>6</sup> Rather than a knowledge that is nescient, this is a nescience that knows, a nescience that crowns all: “What new light! But what ignorance! I see nothing and yet I see all!”

Concerning this wisdom of the Holy Spirit, this knowledge formed in the darkness of faith yet resulting from instinctive connaturality and the fire of love, John of St. Thomas (1589-1644) writes: “Although love cannot, in what concerns the subject upon which it bears, experience and attain to *anything other* than what is proposed to it by knowledge, nevertheless love can attain the object in a way *better* than any accessible to the intellect. It is indeed quite possible that the object be proposed by the intellect in an obscure and confused manner and that the will nevertheless tends towards it immediately and as it is in itself: so it is, for example, with charity, which knows God only obscurely, in faith. The will, furthermore, is wont to desire the thing in itself and to possess it in joy all the more that it is veiled from it; for though that thing be not manifested clearly and openly, the veils which cover it permit one to surmise that there is *more* in it than they allow to be seen or reveal. This *more*, which is hidden,

the will desires with ever greater ardour, uniting itself in affection to that very object which the intellect fails to conceive. Thus, although faith governs the love of God and union with Him, inasmuch as it presents the object of that love and union, nevertheless in virtue of that union by which love adheres immediately to God, the intellect is elevated, by a certain affective experience, so that it can judge divine things in a higher way than the obscurity of faith alone allows; because it penetrates deeply and it knows that there is *more that is hidden* in the things of faith than faith itself reveals, and in those things it finds more to love and to enjoy in love; and because of this *more*, the love of which proves to the intellect that it *is* hidden in those things, the intellect judges divine things in a more eminent mode, in virtue of a special impulsion of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> So, upon the path faith opens by means of concepts, love causes faith to go farther than concepts do.

Let us examine this formula which defines the relation of common, preachable, cataphatic theology to mystical, unspoken, apophatic theology.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. IN THE LINE OF CONCEPTS, BUT BEYOND CONCEPTS

*Upon the path faith opens by means of concepts. . . .*  
 Upon this route and upon no other. For the mystics, all this doesn't raise even the shadow of a problem. The revealed statements of Scripture, of the Symbol of the Apostles, of infallible teaching—wherein are expressed the double original revealed Fact, necessary



for all times that men may draw near to God, namely the fact "that He exists and is a rewarder of those who seek Him"—these are the foundation upon which all the interior certitude of the mystics rests and without which they know their whole spiritual adventure would founder in illusion. They cling to the teachings of faith with a fiery tenacity like that of the apostle Paul who, though he was able to disclose to the perfect a mysterious wisdom taught by the Holy Spirit alone (1 Cor. ii. 13), trembled at the thought that the Corinthians might forget the dogmas of the only Gospel capable of saving them, provided they held fast to its meaning; and it was the same apostle who protested that if Christ had not risen, their faith would be vain, they would still remain in their sins, and he, along with them, would be of all men the most miserable (1 Cor. xv. 17-19). In other words, without an unshakable affirmative and cataphatic theology, there is no negative and apophatic theology.<sup>9</sup> In this place we should like to introduce Ruysbroeck's comparison concerning the ants: "The ant does not make strange paths, but all follow the same path and, awaiting the proper time, they become able to fly." So it is, continues Ruysbroeck, with those whose life is a burning love: "They will not invent strange ways or curious methods, but through all storms they will follow the path of love, towards the place whither love shall guide them. And when the appointed time has come, and they have persevered in all the virtues, they shall be fit to behold God, and their wings shall bear them towards His mystery."<sup>10</sup>

But upon the path faith opens by means of concepts, *love causes faith to go farther than concepts do*. It is the law of knowledge, St. Thomas repeatedly says, to be achieved in accordance with the mode of being of the knower, and in this sense knowledge is a process whereby things are transferred intentionally to the mind of the knower.<sup>11</sup> It is the law of love, however, to tend to things as they are in themselves.<sup>12</sup> The law of love is "ecstasy".<sup>13</sup> Now, up to a certain point, love can make knowledge follow in its wake, but only by drawing it away from the conceptual judgment (which is connatural to knowledge and to wisdom "by way of science"), in order to propel it towards the silent mystery of the judgment that follows upon inclination and towards the mystery of wisdom "by way of experience".

When, thanks to the gifts of intelligence and wisdom, the intellect of the believer, quickened by increase of charity, has been chastened, sweetened, made transparent in its very depths to the pure and sublime efficacy of theological faith, the latter becomes for this believer, wonderfully penetrating, delightful, divinatory, peace-giving. The "night" of this faith is an eve. Touching the mystery of the infinite simplicity of the divine reality, it vehemently presses towards that *more* which revealed concepts cannot make manifest, and by which those concepts, so to speak, know themselves to be surpassed: "Thou doest well, then, O soul, in seeking Him always in His secret place; for thou greatly magnifiest God, and drawest near unto Him, esteeming Him as far beyond all thou canst reach.

Rest thou, therefore, neither wholly nor in part, on what thy faculties can embrace; never seek to satisfy thyself with what thou comprehendest in God, but rather with what thou comprehendest not; and do not rest on the love of that which thou canst understand and feel, but rather on that which is beyond thy understanding and feeling: this is to seek Him by faith: *que eso es buscarle en fe.*" <sup>14</sup> Faith, which at the outset necessarily employs concepts, is thus later driven to transcend them; following the path which concepts have opened to it, faith is impelled not, indeed, to go beyond the mystery of reality they express, but beyond the imperfect and fragmentary way in which they express it, <sup>15</sup> and to culminate in an assent *conditioned*, to be sure, by the presence of concepts, but one which ceases to employ concepts as a formal means of knowledge, because faith is in itself transconceptual, without mode, obscure, rich in all that has been antecedently specified by concepts. <sup>16</sup>

##### 5. A TEXT FROM THE "MYSTICAL THEOLOGY"

Now what we are speaking of is called infused contemplation or mystical knowledge. It feeds upon silence. It must set aside all concepts, negative as well as positive. It becomes negative in a new and an absolute sense. <sup>17</sup> Let us reserve for it the term "apophatic theology".

From all this we can understand what Dionysius says in his little work entitled *Mystical Theology*: "It is by a forceful, absolute, pure abandonment of

yourself and of all things, that, forsaking all and delivered from all, you will be drawn towards the super-essential radiance of the divine obscurity . . . . Then the mind, freed of that which is seen and which sees, penetrates into the darkness of true mystical nescience, from which all cognitive perception is excluded; and joining itself to that which is completely intangible and invisible, it gives itself wholly to Him Who is above all things. Belonging to no one, neither to oneself nor to anyone else, the mind, in the better part of itself and in the absence of all [conceptual] knowledge, is united to the pure Unknowable; knowing nothing [conceptually], its knowledge transcends all that can be conceived. . . . The Divinity is neither darkness nor light, error nor truth; absolutely nothing can be either affirmed or denied of It. . . . As the perfect and sole Cause of all things, It surpasses every affirmation; and as the transcendence of Him Who exists in absolute independence of all things, being beyond all things, It surpasses every negation !”<sup>18</sup>

Beyond [conceptual] affirmation and negation—unless there be merely the emptiness caused by the abrogation of all thought—there is room for nothing but the blind knowledge born of love.

## 6. THE EVANGELICAL REVELATION OF THE WISDOM OF LOVE

If neo-Platonic echoes are still perceptible in Dionysius’ account, the authentic Christianity with which it is imbued has progressively purified it, making

it signify ever less inadequately the mystery of the radiant, obscure, ineffable knowledge communicated to the world in its supreme and perfect form by the incarnate Word and by the Spirit of Pentecost.<sup>19</sup>

Many passages in the New Testament proclaim the secret procession of this humble and loving knowledge in the hearts of true believers. It is the Gospel itself: "I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst *reveal* them to little ones. Yes, Father, for such was thy good pleasure" (Matt. xi. 25-26). "He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and *manifest myself to him*. . . . If anyone love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him. . . . I have made known to them Thy name, and *will make it known*, in order that the love with which Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John xiv. 21, 23; xvii. 26).

It is the Apocalypse: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: To him who overcomes, I will give the hidden manna, and I will give him a white pebble, and upon the pebble a new name written, *which no one knows except him who receives it*. . . . Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man listens to my voice and opens the door to me, I will come in to him and will sup with him, *and he with me*" (ii. 17; iii. 20).

It is the Apostle Paul: "We speak among those who are mature . . . of the wisdom of God", of those things that "eye has not seen nor ear heard" nor

which have “entered into the heart of man”; “but to us *God has revealed them through His Spirit*. For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things, of God. For who among men knows the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the things of God no one knows but the Spirit of God. . . . The spiritual man judges all things, and he himself is judged by no man. For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct him?’ *But we have the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor. ii. 6-7, 9-11, 15-16). “But we all, *with faces unveiled*, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His very image from glory to glory, as through the spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. iii. 18). “Now you have not received a spirit of bondage so as to be again in fear, but *you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry ‘Abba, Father!’* The Spirit Himself gives testimony to our spirit that we are sons of God . . . the Spirit helps our weakness . . . *the Spirit Himself pleads for us with unutterable groanings*. And he who searches the hearts knows what the Spirit desires, that He pleads for the saints according to God” (Rom. viii. 15-16, 26-27). May you “have Christ dwelling through faith in your hearts: so that, being rooted and grounded in love, *you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and know Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge, in order that you may be filled unto the fullness of God*” (Eph. iii. 17-19).

How can one doubt that these texts, and others of like nature, contain, among so many revealed treasures,

the communication of a wisdom by connaturality of love, to those believers who love most: a mystical wisdom born of experience ?<sup>20</sup>

# 7. THE INEFFABILITY OF THIS WISDOM ACCORDING TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE MYSTICS

The contemplatives never tire of singing the praises of this wisdom, wherein God becomes for them, ineffably, “known as unknown”, or rather “unknown as known”: a wisdom which, as though all of a sudden, finds its free and supreme expression during the decline of the Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup>

Hadewijch the Beguine,<sup>22</sup> who precedes Ruysbroeck by about a century, knows well that to love Love, one must willingly “lose one’s soul”:

*If I desire some thing, I do not know it,  
For I am ever a prisoner  
Of abysmal nescience.  
He betrays his inexperience, so it seems to me,  
Who professes himself able to relate  
That which is found in the depths.  
O! my God, what fortune  
No longer to understand, no longer to see . . .  
If we possessed “something” before,  
Love has reduced us to “nothing”.*

The same transconceptual silence is found in the poem entitled “Unveiled”:

*The unity of the naked truth,  
Sweeping away all argument,*

*Holds me in this emptiness  
And fashions me to the simple nature  
Of the eternal Being.*

*Here all discourse must cease.  
Those who have never understood the Word of God  
Would seek in vain to express  
What I have found, without mediation, unveiled,  
Beyond all reasonings.*<sup>23</sup>

The ineffability of mystical and transconceptual wisdom is designated by Blessed Angela of Foligno (died 1309) alternately under the comparison of light and of darkness: "Unto the soul (now drawn forth out of all darkness) is then vouchsafed the utmost knowledge of God which I do think could be granted. . . . It is not possible to say anything whatever concerning it or to find words wherewith to express it; neither can the imagination of the understanding in any way reach unto it, so immeasurably doth it exceed all things."<sup>24</sup> After the revelation she received on her pilgrimage to Assisi, she heard the Lord say to her: "When thou hast returned to thy house, thou wilt experience a sweetness thou hast never experienced before. And then will I no longer speak to thee as I have done till now. But thou wilt feel."<sup>25</sup> To the little friar minor who read to her what she had said, she replied: "That which is worse, and is nothing, this thou hast written. But of the precious thing that my soul feels, hast thou written nothing."<sup>26</sup> And again: "It seems to me that, whatever I say, I blaspheme."<sup>27</sup> She adds, after a divine visitation: "When I had come



round to myself again, I knew very certainly that the greater one's experience of God, the less can one speak of it. For those who have experience of this infinite and unutterable Good can by this very fact speak of It all the less. . . . When thou wouldst preach, heaven grant thou mayest understand. . . . For then wouldst thou be unable to say anything at all about God. And then would every tongue be silent. And then would I like to come to thee and say: 'Brother, speak to me now a little about God!' And thou couldst say nothing to people nor in any way think of God, so greatly would His infinite goodness overreach thee. Nor does the soul then lose consciousness, nor is the body deprived of any of its senses. One is wholly in possession of oneself. But with power wouldst thou say to the people: 'Go, with God's blessing, for I can say nothing to you!' . . . And I know that all the things said in the Scriptures, or by all men since the beginning of the world even to this day, would appear to me as powerless to express anything that is 'of the essence', not even what a grain of sand is in comparison with the universe." <sup>28</sup>

The English mystic of the fourteenth century, to whom we owe *The Cloud of Unknowing*, writes profoundly: "All reasonable creatures, angel and man, have in them, each one by himself, one principal power, which is called a knowing power, and another principal working power, which is called a loving power. Of these two powers, to the first, which is a knowing power, God, Who is the maker of them, is evermore incomprehensible; but to the second, the loving power,

He is, in every man diversely, all comprehensible to the full. Insomuch that one loving soul alone in itself, by virtue of love, may comprehend in itself Him, Who is sufficient to the full—and much more, without comparison—to fill all the souls and angels that may be. And this is the endless marvellous miracle of love, the working of which shall never have end, for ever shall He do it, and never shall He cease for to do it. . . .<sup>29</sup> And weep not, because I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it is any cloud congealed of the vapours that fly in the air, or any darkness such as in thine house on nights, when thy candle is out. . . . Let be such falsehoods; I mean not thus. For when I say darkness, I mean a lacking of knowing. . . .<sup>30</sup> And therefore I would leave all that thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing that I cannot think. And why? Because He may well be loved, but not thought. By love may He be gotten and holden, but by thought never. . . .<sup>31</sup> And smite upon that thick *cloud of unknowing* with a sharp dart of longing love; and go not thence for aught that befalleth. . . .<sup>32</sup> The higher part of contemplation (as it may be had here) hangeth all wholly in this darkness and in this *cloud of unknowing* with a loving stirring and a blind beholding unto the naked being of God Himself only. . . .<sup>33</sup> For, one thing I tell thee: it is more profitable to the health of thy soul, more worthy in itself, and more pleasing to God and to all the saints and angels in heaven—yea ! and more helpful to all thy friends, bodily and ghostly, quick and dead—such a blind stirring unto God for Himself, and such a secret setting upon this cloud of

unknowing. . . . ”<sup>34</sup> And we find these words concerning Mary Magdalen: “ She hung up her love and her longing desire in this *cloud of unknowing*, and learned to love a thing which she might not see clearly in this life by light of understanding in her reason, nor yet verily feel in sweetness of love in her affection. Inso-much that she had oftentimes little special thought whether she ever had been a sinner or none.”<sup>35</sup>

Ruysbroeck (1293–1381) strikes the same note, for instance, in a poem in *The Book of the Twelve Beguines*:

*Pure non-knowing is not God  
But the light in which one sees Him.  
Those who live in this nescience  
Perceive in the divine light a desert.  
Pure non-knowing surpasses reason  
Yet does not suppress reason.  
This nescience sees all things  
And marvels at none;  
To be astonished is beneath her;  
Amazement, contemplative life knows not.  
In nescience unconditioned, one sees  
Yet without knowing what one sees,  
For what is seen transcends all things;  
“ This ” it is not, nor is it “ that ”.* <sup>36</sup>

In *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, Ruysbroeck describes “ the mind that immerses itself in the love of fruition ”. “ Then ”, he says, “ there is brought about supernaturally and without mediation, a meeting and a union wherein our highest happiness lies. . . . This

meeting and this union with God, by which the loving spirit is favoured and which are had through no intermediary, must be effected in the very depths of our being, in a place profoundly hidden from all our intelligence. . . . In tending towards fruition, our spirit seeks repose in God, beyond every created likeness, and obtains that which it desires.”<sup>37</sup>

In one of his Spiritual Poems, St. John of the Cross extols “the knowledge that knows not”:

*I entered, but I knew not where,  
And there I stood nought knowing,  
All science transcending.  
. . . he who comes here truly  
Annihilates himself,  
And all his previous knowledge  
Seems ever less and less;  
His science grows, and he  
Abides as one nought knowing,  
All science transcending.*<sup>38</sup>

In Stanza XXXIX of *A Spiritual Canticle*, the mystical doctor celebrates “the breathing of the Air . . . in the serene night, with the fire that consumes, but without pain”.<sup>39</sup> This night, he says, is contemplation: “Contemplation is obscure; and that is the reason why it is also called mystical theology, that is, the secret or hidden wisdom of God . . . wherein God, without the sound of words . . . teaches the soul—and the soul knows not how—in a most secret and hidden way.”<sup>40</sup> In *The Living Flame of Love*<sup>41</sup> he says: “If such persons as these have no taste for the words of

God which He speaks inwardly to them, it is not to be supposed that all others are like them. St. Peter loved the words of Christ, for he replied, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life' (John vi. 69). The woman of Samaria forgot the water, and 'left her water-pot' (ibid., iv. 28) at the well, because of the sweetness of the words of God. And now when the soul has drawn so near unto God as to be transformed in the Flame of Love, when the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are in communion with it, is it anything incredible to say that it has a foretaste . . . of everlasting life?" But the soul then grasps nothing directly! If it did "it would be making no progress, because God is incomprehensible, surpassing all understanding. And so the farther it ('the penitent', in Lewis' translation) advances, the farther from itself it must go, walking by faith, believing and not seeing; it thus draws nearer to God by not understanding than by understanding".<sup>42</sup> In the contemplation of which we speak, namely that which God infuses into the soul, "it is not at all necessary for the soul to have distinct knowledge, or to form many discursive acts, because God Himself is then communicating to it living knowledge, which is at the same time heat and light indistinctly". St. John of the Cross proceeds to explain the mutual relations of knowledge and love: "And then according to the state of the intellect is love also in the will; as the knowledge is general and obscure—the intellect being unable to conceive distinctly what it understands—so the will also loves generally and indistinctly. For as God is light and love in this delicate

communication, He informs equally the intellect and will, though at times His presence is felt in one more than in another. At one time the intellect is more filled with knowledge than the will with love, and at another love is deeper than intelligence".<sup>43</sup>

Again, at one time it seems that all is light without love; at another that all is love without light. For, when the soul acts by its own power, it cannot love without understanding; but it is otherwise when God acts in the soul, for He can communicate Himself to one power and not to another, inflaming the will by the touch of His love without the intellect understanding anything, just as one receives heat in approaching a fire which one does not see.<sup>44</sup> So it is that the will often feels that it is enkindled, softened, in love, without knowing anything or understanding anything more definite than before,<sup>45</sup> God bestowing charity upon the will according to the saying of the Spouse in the Cantic of Canticles: *He brought me into the cellar of wine: He set in order charity in me.*<sup>46</sup>

## 8. THE DEFINITION OF MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

"An experiential, affective (*Dei affective*) wisdom, divinely infused, whereby the mind, purified of all disorder, is united intimately to God by supernatural acts of faith, hope, and charity." Such is the definition proposed by Père Balthasar Cordier, S.J., in the second chapter of his introduction to the Latin edition and translation of the Works of Dionysius (1634); and he refers us to St. John of the Cross on the manner in

which intelligence, memory, will and affectivity are transformed by faith, hope, and charity.<sup>47</sup>

## 9. WHETHER ST. THOMAS AQUINAS TOOK MYSTICAL THEOLOGY INTO ACCOUNT

It is true that in the twelfth Question (Article XIII) of the First Part of the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas lists only three kinds of knowledge of God: (1) by natural *reason*, (2) by the “*revelation of grace*”, (3) by the *beatific vision*. But he had already<sup>48</sup> distinguished the two supernatural wisdoms concerning God which one may acquire in this life: one “by way of knowledge”, the other “by way of inclination”. And he subsequently deals with the nature of the gifts of the Holy Spirit<sup>49</sup> and the gifts of intelligence, science, and wisdom.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, under pain of mutilating his thought, we are obliged to distinguish in the “revelation of grace” two distinct wisdoms, two theologies: in the one conceptual, affirmative, cataphatic; the other transconceptual, unexpressed, apophatic.<sup>51</sup>

This flame of the ineffable theology of the Holy Spirit already burned in the holy doctor's heart while, out of love for novices in sacred science and above all for the Truth, he suffered himself to descend to the level of conceptual, communicable, kerygmatic theology, and on that level dictated the *Summa*. But on the sixth of December, 1273, three months before his death, following the ecstasy he experienced in Naples during Mass, the divine plenitude which dwelt in the highest part of his great imperturbable and silent soul, suddenly

overflowed upon the inferior powers of his being with such force that it became impossible for him to continue writing and dictating; and to Brother Reginald, who urged him to complete the *Summa* notwithstanding, Thomas replied that he could do no more, that all he had written seemed to him as straw: *omnia quae scripsi videntur mihi paleae*.<sup>52</sup>

## 10. THE DIALECTIC OF MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

The dialectic of the theology of love proceeds in a still more mysterious fashion than that of cataphatic theology.

In its preparatory stage this dialectic avidly seeks the concepts of faith. It commits itself without reserve or any possible turning-back, to the course concepts open to it, knowing that nothing is better than love when love advances in the truth and nothing worse when it strays therefrom.<sup>53</sup> The theology of love clings to concepts all the more strongly that it intends to transcend them and thus to enter into a stillness beyond them, a stillness which in its fulness embraces all that the concepts express.

It is only at this point that the dialectic proper to apophatic knowledge begins. The general law of love is to cast itself upon beings as they exist in themselves—in the conditions of their very existentiality. (See above, p. 76). Loving wisdom encounters God, primarily, and then His creation. It goes forth first of all that it may be disposed to meet Him; it enters into Him; it buries itself and loses itself in the depths of His



ineffability. And then, from the pinnacle of heaven, this loving wisdom, lightning-like, descends again towards creatures ; for it cannot see them except they be illumined by the radiance of divine Love. This loving wisdom thus enters into God and goes out from Him ; enters again into Him and again goes out ; and each time it finds pastures (John x. 9). Each descent towards the universe is for it a cause of wonder.

Creatures, even the lowliest or the frailest, a blade of grass, a sparrow, even the heavens, the stars, the whole world—all are in the eyes of this wisdom wonderfully full of God :

*A thousand graces diffusing  
He passed through the groves in haste,  
And beholding them only  
As He passed,  
He clothed them with His beauty.*<sup>54</sup>

The dispensations of divine providence respecting the salvation of Gentiles and Jews place the perspective of universal history, with the intermingling of its goods and its evils, outside that history itself: " For God has shut up all in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all. Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God ! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways ! For ' who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counsellor ? Or who has first given to Him, that recompense should be made him ? ' For from Him and through Him and unto Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever, amen " (Rom. xi. 32-36).

This loving wisdom holds the key which, even here below, can unlock the hidden sense of the Last Judgment: "When, morning or eve, I say to God in prayer: *By thine Advent, deliver me, O Lord! By thy Nativity and thy Passion, deliver me!* there is scarcely any invocation that gives me such joy as this: *By thy holy judgments, deliver me, O Lord!* . . . For I discern God's goodness in one who is damned, or in many damned, no less than in one single good and holy man, or in many such. But this profound truth was shown me only once. Since then, I have never forgotten it, nor the joy this knowledge brings. And though all the things that are of faith should fail, yet for this reason alone would I remain certain of God: because of His judgments, because of the justice of His judgments. But, oh what a fathomless depth is there here! And all this is for the benefit of good souls, since every soul which would or will have understanding of these judgments and of this deep truth will, in all that comes to pass, reap the fruit of this knowledge of God's Name. . . ." <sup>55</sup>

"Once when I was praying<sup>56</sup> I asked God (not that I doubted anything, but that I might learn more of Him): 'Lord, why hast thou created man? And after having created us, why hast thou permitted us to sin? And why didst thou permit thyself to suffer so great a Passion for our sins, when thou hadst it completely in thy power to will that we should ever remain without all these Mysteries and yet be pleasing to thee and possess as much virtue as we can acquire through Them? . . . And I was given to understand that God had done and permitted all this because His goodness was thereby

better manifested to us, and because for us it was more fitting so. But that answer I did not fully comprehend. . . . Then, all at once, my soul was lifted up and enlightened; it beheld the unutterable power and will of God, and I knew in all fulness and all certitude that which I had asked. . . . And in this power and will of God, I understood even more than I had sought to know. For the plenary answer was given me regarding all creatures: the saved and all who would be saved, the damned and those who would be damned, the demons and all the saints. But there is no word whereby I can express this knowledge that was given me, since it wholly transcends our nature.<sup>57</sup> And although I fully understood that God could have acted otherwise if He had so willed, nevertheless, in seeing His power and His goodness, I could not imagine anything He could have done which would have been better for us, nor anything more glorifying which He could have given us. And from that time forward I have remained so contented and assured that if I knew very certainly I would be damned, in no way should I be able to suffer from that knowledge; nor should I labour any the less, nor strive the less to pray to Him and to honour Him ”.<sup>58</sup>

More often, however, it is the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation which enraptures the wisdom of love: of contemplating the infinite God Who descends into a Virgin's womb, this wisdom never has its fill: “ O virgin Mother of God, He whom the whole world cannot contain hid Himself in thy womb, and was made man ”; <sup>59</sup> He Who suffered people to come near to Him

and to touch Him, Who for thirty-three years held converse with men, humbled Himself even unto the death of the Cross, and at the very moment when His Passion began, gave His Body as food and the chalice of His Blood as drink.

So it is clear that mystical theology, with sovereign freedom, now speaks and now remains silent. It speaks when it issues from God; it remains silent when it returns to Him. In its poetry, in the language of prose or of verse, it can glorify all the manifestations of the divine immensity, yet in the presence of that immensity it is mute. It is in turn the most silent and the most eloquent, the most sober and the most lyrical. What is more, mystical theology at once speaks and is silent. For it speaks only to extol the divine ineffability of which creation is full. Beneath every cosmic sound it can hear, love, sense, only the dimensions of the eternal silence.

## 11. MYSTICISM IN NON-CHRISTIAN LANDS

Could the rays of true mystical knowledge, which flow down from the Cross of the Saviour, have touched one or another of the sages of India? That is not incredible. According to Olivier Lacombe, Vedantic thought recognized two paths of deliverance leading to the Absolute: the perilous path of *pure knowledge*, through detachment from the external world, centred upon the presence of God's immensity in the depths of the soul; and the higher way of *friendship through grace and love*, opened directly upon God's own personality. The first leads the soul only to the

experience of its own self, and is perpetually as a bride without her spouse; whereas the second makes the soul share in God's own experience and live by His own most sublime Life.<sup>60</sup>

For Islam, where the divine transcendence is commonly professed, the hypothesis we have just advanced seems still more probable.<sup>61</sup> One thing is certain: if, in Hindu or Moslem schools, or elsewhere, one finds "cases of authentic mystical experience, these cases result from divine grace and from infused contemplation, more or less modified in their typical forms by special conditions of development, existing outside the affluence of sacramental grace and the visible radiation of the revealed truth".<sup>62</sup> Therefore, if one wishes to be exact, one will not speak of "non-Christian mystics". There is but one authentic supernatural mysticism; that which presently flows forth from the radiant heart of Christ. One might speak of the manifestations of Christian mysticism in non-Christian lands, or employ some similar expression.<sup>63</sup>

## 12. INTUITION IN DARKNESS

Now let us speak of the "nescience which knows": the loving faith which in silence clings to the splendour of the divine darkness, to the mystery of trinitarian Life hidden in the very depths of elect souls. ("If anyone love me . . . we will come to him and make our abode with him"—John xiv. 23.)

Granting it is accurate to say that such nescience can know without recourse to the "way of knowledge"

and does not require concepts as formal means of knowing, one should point out that in wonderfully nourishing the spirit, by faith and not by evidence, this "nescient knowing" is an *enlightening night*; that in proceeding not by successive steps but in one leap, it is direct, like a glance, and in this sense intuitive; that in abolishing every intermediary, all distance, every concept which could be employed as a formal means of knowing, it is *immediate*, like a touch of the hand; that in healing inequalities ("I have called you friends", Jesus says, John xv. 15; and friendship, we know, presupposes or creates equality), it is *unitive* and *transforming*.<sup>64</sup>

This knowing nescience may be accompanied by extraordinary phenomena, notably visions and revelations, which on certain levels of spiritual ascent might become quite frequent and in the number of which, among other possibilities, one must reckon the possibility of a miraculous *vision* of God attained through the mediation of one of those ideas, one of those notions, which are natural to the angels: a vision revealing directly, *evidentially* (without the detours necessary for visible creatures, but as one sees in a mirror directly that which is reflected in it), not *what* God is *in Himself*, no doubt, but *that* He is the Author of the world of nature and of grace.<sup>65</sup>

Extraordinary phenomena, however, are never more than supports, like scaffolding around a building; and mystical life, essentially, is by no means an excursion into evidence and into visions, but into the transluminous and much more complete obscurity of faith.

It is the great lesson of St. John of the Cross: "this loving obscure knowledge, which is *faith*, serves, in a manner, in this life as means of the divine *union*, as the *light of glory* hereafter serves for the *beatific vision*".<sup>66</sup>

"In this way, then, by means of mystical theology and secret love, the soul goeth forth from all things and from itself, ascending upwards unto God. For love is like fire, which ever ascends, hastening to be absorbed in the centre of its sphere."<sup>67</sup> When it leaves the body, the soul will immediately enter into the "clear vision of God", but "until that day come, notwithstanding the heights to which the soul ascends, something still remains secret from it, and that in proportion to the distance from its perfect likeness to the divine essence".<sup>68</sup>

Treating of the highest point of knowledge by "similitude of grace", St. Bonaventure says: it comes to pass that "the mind's eye fixes upon God so intensely that it observes (*aspiciat*) nothing else; and nevertheless, it will have neither the evidence (*non-perspiciet*) nor the vision of the brightness of that Light: it will bury itself in *darkness* by turning away from everything else, as Dionysius teaches in the *Mystical Theology*, calling this knowledge a learned ignorance: *docta ignorantia*. Here love is kindled wondrously, as we see in those to whom it is given sometimes to be lifted up in heavenly transports. I believe this way of knowing must be desired here below by every just man. If God accomplishes something more in man, it is an exceptional privilege, outside the common law of human life".<sup>69</sup> Beyond the "similitude of grace" there is, for

St. Bonaventure, the “deiformity of glory” wherein God discloses His countenance.<sup>70</sup>

### 13. THE ESOTERICISM OF LOVE

This “nescience which knows” is not an esoteric thing reserved for a small number of initiates and intellectuals. It is offered to beggars, to the outcast, to the humble of heart, to all who are great of soul and afflicted in body. “I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and prudent, and didst reveal them to little ones. Yes, Father, for such was thy good pleasure” (Matt. xi. 25–26).

Henri Bremond records the story of the foundress of the Reformed Bernardines in Dauphiné, who, while at Ponçonas in her childhood, met a little cowherd “so uncouth that at first she did not seem to know anything of God. The nun took the little girl aside and began with good will to instruct her. . . . This marvellous girl . . . burst into tears and entreated to be taught how to finish her *Pater*, ‘for’, said she in her mountain *patois*, ‘I don’t know how to end. For near five years, when I’ve said the word *Pater* and think . . . that He is up there (pointing to the sky), that He is my Father . . . I weep and remain all day in that state while I herd my cows’ ”.<sup>71</sup>

If one wishes to speak of “esotericism” in this context, it is not an esotericism of human intelligence and effort but of the divine love, of the prevenience and the predilections of grace: grace which deserts the



high places that it may gather the harvest in the valleys. It is an esotericism thanks to which the last become first, the poor rich, and the ignorant wise.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. ST. I, 1, 6, ad. 3.

2. ST. I, 13, 3, ad. 2. On the exegesis of the texts of Dionysius, see below, p. 110, note 51. A passage of the Brihad-Aranyaka-Upanishad, listing the numerous attributes of Brahman, is followed by the celebrated formula: "Not ! not ! *neti, neti*; for, beyond that of which one says Not !, there is nothing, and its name is the reality of the real." Citing this text, Ramanuja explains: "The doctrine respecting the nature of Brahman as endowed with distinct attributes cannot possibly be disclaimed by this formula *not ! not !* . . . Since there is negation, however, the nature of Brahman is in fact limited by the preceding description, which limitation is negated by the apophatic formula. This *not ! not !* . . . does not deny that Brahman is *endowed* with distinct attributes; it denies that he is *circumscribed* by the attributes previously affirmed. Consequently, it is true that the Supreme Brahman is characterized in a twofold manner: positively and negatively." (Cited by O. Lacombe, *L'Absolu selon le Vedānta*, pp. 297-299.)

3. Q. 7, a. 5, ad. 2.

4. *Cael. hier.*, ii, PG. III, col. 141.

5. See above, pp. 29-30.

6. St. Thomas, ST. I, 1, 6, ad. 3. Dionysius writes that his master Hierotheus was instructed either at the school of sacred theologians, or by a deep study of the Scriptures, "or by some more divine inspiration, not only in learning but also in suffering divine things: being introduced, if one may speak thus, into their incommunicable and mystical union and faith" (*De div. nom.*, Ch. 2, no. 9; PG. III, col. 648).

7. *De donis Spiritus sancti*, a 4, n. 13 and 14, Vivès ed., vol. VI, p. 638. In Raïssa Maritain's translation (Paris, 1930, p. 142) we find this penetrating note: "It remains always true that love tends only to the known. For obscure knowledge, like that of faith, is aware of its own obscurity, that is, it is aware that it is

*transcended* by its object, and thus it manifests the latter in some way. And it is because this knowledge is conscious of its own obscurity, that it can be the basis of a love which goes beyond it."

8. In these pages the word theology is used to designate a certain point of view concerning the mystery of God, a certain mode of knowing or of "stammering out" divine things; it designates a divine wisdom.

It is in this sense that Denys the Carthusian (1402-1471) contrasts the "affirmative theology" of the *Divine Names* of the Pseudo-Dionysius with the "negative theology" of the latter's *Mystical Theology*. Cf. Denys, *Opera Omnia*, Tournai, 1902, vol. XVI, p. 484. (Denys the Carthusian was born at Ryckel in the Netherlands. His works form a vast encyclopedia of the scholastic teaching of the Middle Ages. Though a compiler rather than an original thinker, Denys is held by some to be the last important Scholastic writer. Known as "the ecstatic doctor", Denys was particularly devoted to the mystical teachings of Dionysius.—*Translator*.) Instead of the term *negative theology*, we might use the expression *mystical and experimental knowledge*.

"This was not vision," St. Teresa writes; "it is, I believe, what is called mystical theology" (*Autobiography*, Ch. 10). The same meaning is found in St. John of the Cross: "'There He taught me the science full of sweetness.' This science is Mystical Theology, which is the secret science of God and which spiritual men call contemplation" (*A Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza XXVII; *Works*, vol. II, p. 148).

What is today commonly called "mystical theology" is only that part of conceptual, affirmative, cataphatic theology which treats of this mystical, negative, apophatic experience.

9. The influence of dogma upon the contemplative life, above all where the latter is explicitly Christian, is a major fact that the psychologist, as such, must take into consideration. Cf. Joseph Maréchal, S.J., *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*, Brussels, 1937, vol. II, p. 461.

10. *L'ornement des noces spirituelles*, trans. by Maurice Maeterlinck, Brussels, 1908, p. 201. Despite the touching humility and docility with which he has read the mystics, this side of their spiritual experience must have escaped the perspicacity of Henri Bergson. Bergson's doctrine of the purely pragmatic value of the conceptual affirmation as such obliged

him to reject, in the order of established and social religion, that which concerns common affirmative theology and prevented him from noting the tenacity with which the mystics themselves cling to that theology, seeing in theological faith the very root of justification for themselves as well as for all men without exception. "If in forming an estimate of mysticism it is best to listen to the mystics themselves, and if the only mysticism which has plainly succeeded is 'that of the great Christian mystics', it is unreasonable to reject their evidence on what is to them more important than their life, and to fail to listen to them when they affirm that mystical experience, far from having a content which we may regard as independent of revealed faith, is only the perfect blossoming of that faith . . ." (Maritain, *Degrees*, p. 357). Thus one will be led to recognize "that all authentic mysticism which has developed in non-Christian countries and which finds in the contemplation of the saints, who grow endlessly in the Church, its achieved exemplar, should be regarded as a fruit of the same supernatural life, that supernatural life which Christ, sovereignly generous in His gifts, communicates to those souls of good will who do not visibly belong to His flock" (*ibid.*).

11. Not at all by altering their *nature*—for the knower as such becomes precisely the other in its otherness, the "other as other"—but in conferring upon things known the *mode* of being of the knower. Thus the stone exists in me in a spiritual mode, though I know it as a material thing; the divine infinity exists in me in a finite mode, though I know It as infinite. Here we are confronted with the whole mystery of "intentional cognitive being", open to its object.

12. This is why one can know good things without becoming better, but cannot love them without becoming better, and can know bad things without becoming worse, but cannot love bad things without becoming worse. Also this is why God, Who would be imperfect if He did not know all things (knowledge tends to the enrichment of the knower), is not imperfect because He does not will all things (love tends to the enrichment of the beloved). Cf. ST. I, 19, 3, ad. 6.

13. This is entirely true of disinterested love, the love of friendship, which wills the good of the friends. Cf. ST. I-II, 28, 3.

14. *A Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza I; *Works*, vol. II, p. 19. Cf. the passage in the *Letter to Caius*, written by Dionysius the Mystic (PG. III, col. 1065; cited by St. Thomas, ST. II-II, 180, 5, ad. 1): "If someone, seeing God, comprehends what he sees, it is not God that he sees, but something of God." And this beautiful text of St. Leo the Great (*Ninth Sermon on the Nativity of our Lord*, PL. LIV, col. 226): "To be unable to express such a mystery of mercy is to us a joy; and we feel it is good for us to be overwhelmed by our powerlessness to plumb the depths of our salvation. Indeed, even if one has progressed far in divine things, one is never nearer the knowledge of truth than when one understands that those things still remain to be discovered. He who believes he has attained the goal, far from finding what he seeks, falls by the wayside." Clearly, when God is perceived in the depths of His Being, there are no longer either Greeks or Latins.

15. "It attains to God as the hidden God, as God the Saviour (Who is all the more hidden in being more truly the Saviour)—this secret wisdom which purifies the soul in secret. While remaining under the control of theology and depending on it for its conditions and foundations in human soil, for the numerous notions and conceptual signs whereby divine Truth is manifested to our intelligence; without any abandonment of revealed dogmas (on the contrary!), knowing better than by concepts the very things which the conceptual formulas of dogma communicate to our human intellects, how can this secret wisdom fail to surpass all distinct notions and every sign which can be expressed, that it may cling in the experience of love to that very reality which is the first object of faith?" (Maritain, *Degrees*, pp. 15-16).

16. "What then has become of concepts? They have not been obliterated; that would be contrary to the very nature of our intelligence, which has need of them in order to be actualized. They are still there. But all distinct concepts have grown silent, are asleep, as the Apostles slept on the Mount of Olives. And confused concepts which intervene, and which may remain wholly unperceived, only play a purely material part. I mean that if mystical experience passes through them, it does so not as through a *formal means* of knowledge which regulates and measures our knowledge, but it passes through them as *conditions*

required by the subject; and that is why they may be so confused, so indistinct,—as little discernible as one will. The formal means and the law of mystical knowledge come from elsewhere. It is the *connaturality of charity which, under the propulsion of the Holy Spirit, plays the formal rôle*. The sole source of the proper light of infused contemplation is in the ardour of a love that burns in the night" (ibid., p. 326).

St. Thomas points out explicitly other applications of this capacity of concepts to support a high type of knowledge without serving as formal media thereof. For example, interpreting the rapture of St. Paul as a vision of the divine essence, St. Thomas adds that this knowledge, while not mediated by any concept, did however implant in the Apostle's mind concepts whose content he would later be able to elaborate (*De Ver.* XIII, 3, ad. 4).

17. In this connection Jacques Maritain distinguishes between the *via negationis* and *negative theology*: "Inasmuch as the *via negationis* announces that God is like no created thing, it is one of the ways of metaphysical or ordinary theological knowledge at its highest point. But inasmuch as *theologia negativa* constitutes a genus of knowledge, a wisdom of a higher order (and that is indeed what is meant when it is distinguished from ordinary theology as being theology of a different type), it is mystical experience or it is nothing. . . . Apophatic theology has a meaning only when it is more than cataphatic theology (as a mode of knowledge); it is not its double and should not be substituted for it; it stands upon the shoulders of cataphatic theology, knowing the same things, but knowing them better. It is negative, not because it simply denies what the cataphatic affirms, but because it attains *more than by affirmation and negation*, that is, more than by communicable enunciations, because it experiences by the mode of ignorance the reality which the other affirms and can never affirm sufficiently" (*Degrees*, pp. 292, 294).

18. Ch. I, n. 1 and 3; Ch. V. In PG. III, col. 1000, 1002, 1048.

According to Denys the Carthusian (*Opera omnia*, vol. XVI, p. 486), those who have written commentaries on these passages are divided into two groups: for some, negative knowledge is exclusively experimental, being realized at the peak of *affectivity*, when the soul is united to the Godhead through love; for others,

including Denys himself, this knowledge is also intellectual; and without in any way attaining to an intuitive vision, it terminates in a proper and an absolute intellective concept of the divine being.

We, however, follow a middle path, holding that mystical theology is indeed a *knowledge* but not itself a *conceptual* knowledge. Mystical theology is the act of the gift of wisdom which charity produces in the believer's intellect, that theological faith may there assume all its own proper dimensions; it is a flower of knowledge upon the bough of love. But this knowledge is transcendental. "To transcend all ways of conceiving while remaining on the plane of the intelligence, and thus of the concept, is a contradiction in terms. Progress beyond must be by love. Love alone, I mean supernatural love, can effect this transition. The mind here on earth can overleap all modes only in a renunciation-of-knowing, where the Spirit of God, making use of the connaturality of charity and the effects produced in the affections by the divine union, gives to the soul a loving experience of that very thing to which no notion has or can possibly have access" (Maritain, *Degrees*, pp. 17-18).

In any case, according to Denys the Carthusian himself, while negative theology apprehends God in a more sublime manner than affirmative theology, it knows Him as completely unknown and in utter darkness: *tamquam omnino ignoto, in omnimodo quoque caligine*, this darkness resulting not from emptiness but from an exceeding fulness which overpowers the mind, now able to gauge the distance still separating it from the vision of God (Denys, *ibid.*, p. 488).

19. In a study entitled *Dionysius in the Middle Ages* ("Etudes Carmélitaines," Oct. 1938, p. 68), where he insists upon the continuity of Dionysius' influence, through John Scotus Erigena (ninth century), the Victorines (twelfth to thirteenth century), the Scholastics (thirteenth century), the Rhenish mystics (fourteenth century), Père G. Thery, O.P., writes: "Dionysius is a suggestive, far more than a doctrinaire, thinker. In the Middle Ages from Louis the Pious (778-840) to the beginning of the fourteenth century, he had been one of the great creators of the soul. . . . It is not at all by the *Celestial Hierarchy* or the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* . . . that Dionysius dominated mediaeval thought; it is by his suggestions that he is the creator of a mentality

and a state of soul; one of these thimblesful of thought fills the *Mystical Theology*: ‘*Giving up all things and set free of all things, thou wilt lift thyself up to the supersubstantial radiance of the divine obscurity.*’ There we have the leaven of the great Catholic mysticism in its double form: on the side of man, recognition of the relative nothingness of our doctrines, total abandonment of ourselves under the hand of Providence; and on the side of God, the impenetrable immensity of His nature and His attributes. This perhaps is not yet St. John of the Cross, but it is without any doubt the same flight towards Him Who eludes all definition and Who does not suffer Himself to be illumined by any of our concepts.”

20. “Of all ascetical writings, the Gospel is the most severe and the most imperious; but it is also more audacious, more sure, and more generous in its invitation to supernatural life and in its promises of intimate communion with God than all the treatises on mystical prayer. *Life eternal is to know Thee, Who art the one true God, and Him Whom Thou hast sent.* It is not a theoretical, abstract science, but a wisdom that is lived, a wisdom full of love, radiating charity, kindness and mercy. The torrent of divine love inundates the attentive and faithful soul, that It may rush back towards Its source and be poured out infinitely upon souls. In the measure that this Love becomes more generous and more intense, the soul is enriched with a deeper knowledge, which, in turn, brings growth in Charity: *Abide in My love . . . He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*”—*Introduction à la vie intérieure*, by a Carthusian friar of La Valsainte, 1941, pp. 50, 57.

These pages, in which the Gospel is put forward as the Code of mystical life, first appeared in “*Nova et Vetera*”, 1932, n. 4, p. 329. (Cf. J. Maréchal, *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*, vol. II, p. 4: “The origins of Catholic mysticism merge with those of Christianity.” The Pauline doctrine of Christ the Redeemer, the Joannine doctrine of the incarnate Word—all “these apostolic teachings betray, by their very tone and their comprehensive reach, a religious experience far above the level of common piety”.)

21. Let me cite a penetrating statement (from “*Nova et Vetera*”, 1938, n. 4, p. 353) intended as an introduction to the

*Spiritual Poems* of Hadewijch (on this mystic, see note 22 below): "We are in the presence of one of the enigmas of spiritual history. If we must admit that the authentic contemplative's way was known from the beginning, with its conditions of renunciation and of solitude—the freedom ever more perfect which it confers and which it exacts and the intuition of unity which crowns it in silence,—it has to be granted, nevertheless, that this absolutely simple inner life, this infinitely rich experience of interior simplicity, was not given definite formulation in religious writings prior to the thirteenth century. No doubt Dionysius the Areopagite is no mere verbal epigone of the neo-Platonists: in him one discerns the trail of a personal ascent [to God]; but this isolated and pseudo-epigraphic testimony leaves us but little satisfied. St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Bernard, Guigues the Carthusian (Guigues du Chastel, legislator of the Carthusian Order and ascetical writer, about 1083 to about 1136—*Tr.*), the Victorines—those indeed are authors for whom contemplation is the culminating point of ascetical effort and of theological speculation; and yet we are obliged to give a very broad interpretation of their categories and their vocabulary if we wish to range them in the same class as the Dutch, German and Spanish masters of the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, where we shall now unhesitatingly look for the exemplification and the doctrine of the Christian *theoria*. Hadewijch is a visionary like Hildegard and many others of the time, but her visions are precisely that part of her work which interests us least: her purity and her profundity, necessarily concealed under the heavy garb of images, are not easily discoverable in her writings. There is no need to assume an invisible tradition, though doubtless many suns are consumed, their heat and light passing over into this deep ether of souls, inaccessible to the fathom-line of the historians. It is sufficient to admit that the contemplative life is not given over to specialization, any more than the other elements of the Christian organism, and has become aware of itself as an autonomous activity only at the end of a long process of ripening, whose sudden fulfilment astonishes us because our knowledge of a process of this kind is still very fragmentary and superficial. The fact remains that in the middle of the thirteenth century, in that fog-laden Flanders which had not yet produced any of the esthetic and mystical masterpieces



in which it was to prove itself so fertile, a flower seems to spring suddenly from the soil, one of the most exquisite in all spiritual literatures: Hadewijch the Beguine—and this is the prelude to a wonderful Spring.”

In his book, *Benedictine Monachism* (London, 1919, Ch. VII and VIII, pp. 75–121), Dom Cuthbert Butler has endeavoured to characterize “Benedictine mysticism”; and he states further on (p. 306) that “there is no Benedictine mysticism other than that of the Church”. (See the suggestion offered below, p. 110, note 46.)

22. Also called “Sister” Hadewijch—“*venerabilis virgo, beata Hadewijch*”—a Flemish mystic of about the middle of the thirteenth century. Her works were well known by Ruysbroeck. (Incidentally, “beguine” is the name for members of certain lay sisterhoods which began in the Low Countries in the twelfth century and are said to be still represented by small communities there.—*Translator*.)

23. *Poèmes spirituels*, “Nova et Vetera,” 1938, n. 4, pp. 362, 367.

24. *Le livre de la bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno*, trans. by P. Doncoeur, Paris, 1926, p. 173.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 52. Cf. p. 160: “If I say He is all good, I ravage Him. And this Trinity which I behold in such great darkness—I feel I remain fixed and rest in the very centre of It. . . . To me it seems that, whatever I say, I blaspheme.”

28. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

29. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. by Dom Justin McCann, 2nd edition, London, 1936, Ch. IV, p. 15.

30. Ch. IV, p. 20.

31. Ch. VI, p. 23.

32. Ch. VI, p. 24.

33. Ch. VIII, p. 31.

34. Ch. IX, pp. 34–35.

35. Ch. XVI, p. 52. (I have slightly modernized the quotations from this work, by eliminating the *the's* before the *which's* and two or three *the which's*. *The Cloud of Unknowing* was written in England about the middle of the fourteenth century. Research has not revealed the identity of the author.—*Translator*.)

36. *Oeuvres de Ruysbroeck l'Admirable*, Brussels, 1938, vol. VI, p. 24.—It is towards the acquisition of this mystical science that the *De docta ignorantia* (1440) of Nicholas of Cusa is directed; and his dialectic of *maxima* and *minima*, though doubtless excessively “euclidean”, nevertheless claims to withdraw in the presence of loving faith (“for faith cannot be *maxima* without charity”) in the mystery of the Incarnate Word, wherein the “absolute” maximum of the divine nature and the “limited” maximum of the highest human nature are made one: “Upon my return from Greece by sea, I was led—doubtless through a gift of the Father of Lights, from Whom proceeds every good gift—to embrace incomprehensible things in an incomprehensible way, in a learned ignorance surpassing all that men can know of incorruptible truths. . . . I have finished my book on Jesus (blessed is He beyond all !), proceeding invariably from the same basis; and the Lord Jesus has grown ever greater in my intelligence and in my love, thanks to the intensification of my faith. Indeed, no man who has the faith of Christ can refuse to be more deeply enkindled with desire to follow this path, so that after having meditated at length, seeing that the most gentle Jesus alone is worthy of one’s love, he abandons all with joy and clings to Him as the true Life and Joy eternal. Everything gives way before him who enters thus into Jesus: there is no Scripture, nothing in the world that can cause him difficulty” (*De la docte ignorance*, tr. Moulinier, Paris, 1930, pp. 184, 215, 225). But the theology which Nicholas of Cusa expounds in the same work, and which is far from being always defensible, justifies Maritain’s remark: “Nicholas of Cusa extended one hand to the pseudo-Dionysius and the great mystics of the Middle Ages, but the other to Boehme and Hegel” (*Degrees*, p. 296).

37. *Oeuvres*, vol. III, pp. 166, 167. We have here, this side of the beatific vision, “the immediate apprehension of God by a love deprived of all positive intellectual determination, yet sustained by the supernatural motion of the Holy Spirit” (J. Maréchal, *Etudes* . . . , vol. II, p. 470).

Elsewhere, describing the “supreme ‘modeless’ knowledge of interior vision, Ruysbroeck says that in order to know the divine essence we must needs be within It, beyond understanding and above our created being, situated at that eternal point where all our lives begin and come to an end; at that point where they

lose their names and every distinguishing mark, becoming one with the point itself, yet in themselves remaining lines which meet. So it is that we shall ever continue to be that which we are in our created essence; and yet always, when we die, we shall enter into our superessence, beyond understanding. Therein we shall be enfolded eternally, unalterably, as in a thing of infinite height, infinite depth, infinite extent" (*Le livre des sept clôtures*—*The Book of the Seven Cloisters*,—Ch. XIX; *Oeuvres*, vol. I, p. 210).

38. From "Ecstasy of Contemplation", *Works*, vol. II, pp. 406–407.

39. *Works*, vol. II, p. 11.

40. Stanza XXXIX, *ibid.*, p. 208. In the Introduction to this Stanza (p. 155), St. John of the Cross writes: "an instant of pure love is more precious in the eyes of God and the soul and more profitable to the Church than all other good works together, though it may seem as if nothing is done. Thus, Mary Magdalen, though her preaching was most edifying, and might have been still more so afterwards, out of the great desire she had to please God and benefit the Church, hid herself in the desert thirty years, that she might surrender herself entirely to love; for she considered that she would gain more in that way, because an instant of pure love is so much more profitable and important to the Church. . . . And after all, is it not for this love that we are all created?"

41. Stanza I, *Works*, vol. II, pp. 221–222.

42. *Ibid.*, Stanza III, p. 276. See above, pp. 76–77.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 276–277.

44. In reality, the invisible mission of the Word is inseparable from the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit: *una missio nunquam est sine alia*, St. Thomas says (*I Sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 2). In the mission of the Holy Spirit, the soul is assimilated to the Holy Spirit through the gift of charity; in the mission of the Word, the soul is assimilated to the Word through the gift of wisdom. Cf. ST. I, 43, 5, ad. 2. But in some cases, the burning of love may far outweigh the splendour of wisdom, while in others the reverse may be true. This is what we understand St. John of the Cross to mean.

45. It seems that the holy doctor wishes to assert here, in opposition to the opinion of Denys the Carthusian (see above,

p. 103, note 18), that though mystical contemplation indeed does not take place without concepts, it is not a conceptual mode of knowledge properly speaking, since it does not employ concepts as *formal media* of knowledge.

46. Cant. ii. 4. It might be said, perhaps, that with the Greeks, then later with St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, supernatural contemplation is described rather by relation to the actual missions of the Word in the intellect; and that with the birth of mysticism in the Middle Ages it begins to be described rather by relation to the missions of the Holy Spirit in the will and to His permanent habitation in the soul. But in this there is only the indication of a dominant note. The general and permanent characteristics of Catholic mysticism are brought to light in Père Maréchal's *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*, notably in volume II, pp. 1-16: "Les tournants principaux dans l'histoire de la mystique catholique"; and pp. 458-472: "Ascèse et mystique chrétiennes".

47. PG. III, col. 97.—Mystical theology is a wisdom (the genus) which is affective (specific difference), infused by God (efficient cause), requires purity of heart (material cause), and unites one intimately to God (final cause) by acts of faith, hope, and charity (means).

48. ST. I, 1, 6, ad. 3.

49. ST. I-II, 68, 2.

50. ST. II-II, Q.'s, 8, 9, 45.—St. Thomas clearly teaches that faith alone, which only produces *adherence* to divine Truth, will, thanks to the gift of wisdom, enable one to *judge* concerning all things according to divine standards, apprehended through connaturality or the union of love. Cf. ST. II-II, 45, 1, ad. 2; 45, 4.

51. The question whether Dionysian negations of the *Celestial Hierarchy* and the *Divine Names* are to be understood as deriving from communicable and cataphatic theology, the negations of the *Mystical Theology*, on the other hand, from silent and apophatic theology, is an historical and, from the point of view we have adopted, a secondary question.

52. Deposition of Bartholomew of Capua.

53. "There is nothing in the world, neither man nor devil nor any thing, of which I am so watchful as love. For love penetrates the soul more deeply than joy or any other thing. And there is

nothing which attracts, fills and binds the whole heart like love." ("Wherein are Discovered the Pitfalls of Spiritual Love," in *Le livre de la bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno*, p. 311.)

54. St. John of the Cross, in poem entitled "A Spiritual Canticle Between the Soul and Christ", *Works*, vol. II, p. 396.

55. *Le livre de la bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno*, p. 164 ff.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

57. Cf. this other passage: "It was now, fellow writer, that I heard her say the most wonderful things in the world, and I understood something of what she then said. But neither could she explain it, though she gave me to understand a little of it, nor could I grasp it sufficiently to put it in writing" (*ibid.*, p. 164).

58. *Ibid.*, p. 117. Allow me to compare these vivid texts on the divine judgments with the following lines from a convent (all this primarily concerns the "fools of love" who, it is believed, are met with in India and in Mohammedan countries): "It is a ray of light from the Church, so it seems to me, which has touched these souls individually. Can any human intellect express such lofty truths without a touch of grace? Without a direct revelation, a kind of little Pentecost, I cannot believe that a soul can aim at annihilation, so contrary to nature, as a means of making it sink down into God." Then these words: "I will tell you that all the most obscure problems, like the number of the elect and the immense mass of unconverted pagans, trouble me no more, for I look upon them not from below but from the heights, from the pinnacle of God's infinitely merciful, infinitely free Love."

59. Gradual of Mass of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin.

60. *L'Absolu selon le Vedânta*, p. 372. On page 364, the author cites a Vedic text, with Ramanuja's commentary upon it: "*The Self is accessible neither through meditative recitation of the Veda, nor through any effort of intellectual penetration, nor through numerous lessons in Vedic scripture; but he whom the Self chooses, he can attain to it. To him, the Self reveals Its inmost being.* After having stated that study, reflection, deep and continuous meditation do not alone afford access to the Self, this text proclaims that the Self is attained by him whom It chooses. For, in truth, it is he who is dearly beloved who becomes worthy of being chosen. But he to whom the Self is unsurpassably dear is he who is very dear to the Self. And the Blessed One in

person spends himself that this dearly beloved friend might attain to the Self: He himself said: *Upon those who, centred always in the Absolute, worship me in love, I bestow that unitive illumination thanks to which they attain even unto me. And again: For I am exceedingly dear to the wise man, and he to me.*"

61. For example, see J. Maréchal, "Ascèse et mystique musulmane," and the more extensive study on al Hallaj entitled "Le problème de la grâce mystique en Islam", in *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*, vol. II, pp. 451-458, 487-531.

Certain reservations are set down on page 463: Unlike the religion of the Incarnation, the legalism of the Koran leaves inward souls without help in their mystical ascent and is incapable of preventing pseudo-mystical deviations, and the spiritual catastrophes such deviations entail.—In Emile Dermenghem's book, *La vie des saints musulmans*, and in his *Note sur la poésie mystique musulmane* (Fontaine, March-April, 1942, nos. 19-20), one will, however, find many sublime touches. Some of the most glowing of these "Aphorismes de la mystique en terre d'Islam", we have reproduced in "Nova et Vetera", 1942 (no. 3, p. 307). In the same review, see the beautiful *Poèmes persans*, translated by Père de Menasce (1942, no. 2, p. 162).

62. Maritain, *Degrees*, p. 336.

63. Maritain profoundly observes: (1) that an explicit knowledge of the mysteries of the redemptive Incarnation and of the gifts of supernatural life create the mental and moral regime suitable to the normal development of supernatural mystical experience; (2) that, in a regime where this experience can enter only in disguising itself, one may believe in numerous graces of substitution; (3) that, however high it may reach, a mystical experience issuing from a purely implicit faith will not ascend to the level of "spiritual marriage", which presupposes an explicit knowledge of the mystery of the Trinity; (4) that, if many Christians have lessons in fidelity to learn from some non-Christians, nevertheless, one would risk deceiving oneself concerning the degree of mystical experience attained by the latter were one to judge solely on the basis of the brilliant expression they have given to that experience; (5) that outside the Church man's quest has a more strained aspect; moreover, the "physics" which prepares the way for contemplation and

accompanies it, not to speak of sometimes questionable accidental gifts, stands forth as particularly objectionable. Cf. *Degrees*, pp. 336, 465-466, 467-469; and in Maritain's *Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle* (Paris, 1939), see p. 173.

Regarding the "graces of substitution" mentioned in point (2) above, allow me to cite the following lines from Pierre de Menasce, *Quand Israël aime Dieu*, p. 150: "The Hasidim . . ., though ignorant of the mode of the Redemption, of the divine Instrument Who is God and also Man, did have a presentiment of the participation of man, invited by God to enter into His heart and to save the world with Him". In explanation of this species of divination, by the Hasidim, of the exigences of the purest Christian charity, Père de Menasce writes: "Is it not reasonable to think that the graces of charity which God has been able to place in these faithful and sincere hearts, separated from Christ by an ignorance quasi-invincible, have, through meditation upon the Old Testament, been extended to the point of generating as it were the virtual image of Reality as seen by those who truly know Jesus the Redeemer?"

64. Having forcefully asserted in his beautiful *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques* that the ecstasy of the Christian mystics is characterized, on the one hand, *negatively* by a cessation of conceptual thinking, and on the other hand *positively*, by a supreme intensification of intellectual activity, Père Maréchal can conclude, irrefutably, it seems to me, that these "two affirmations are contradictory for all imaginable hypotheses save one, namely that the human intellect can in certain conditions elevate itself to an intuition which is properly its own" (*Etudes*, vol. I, 1938, p. 231). But I am unable to follow Père Maréchal when he insists upon the illuminative, non-discursive, immediate, ineffable nature of mystical knowledge, only to suggest that the intuition of God wherein that knowledge culminates *normally*, though rarely, would be that precarious and exceptional vision of the divine essence which St. Augustine and after him, St. Thomas, thought it possible to attribute to Moses and to St. Paul. Cf. *Etudes*, vol. II, pp. 34, 38 *et passim*. (And see below, pp. 115 ff.)

65. St. Thomas speaks of this preternatural knowledge of angelic type ("by means not of visible creatures but of a spiritual

likeness impressed upon the mind”) apropos of the first man, to whom St. Thomas thought such knowledge would have been granted. (Cf. *De Ver.*, XVIII, 2; ST. I, 94, 1). In the treatise on the angels, St. Thomas explicitly states: (1) that, being created, the divine image impressed upon the angel’s intellect is radically insufficient to represent the divine essence adequately; (2) that the specular knowledge, whereby God is discerned in this image, is direct and not discursive. (See ST. I, 56, 3; and I. 58, 3, ad. 1.) The knowledge which angels have by “spiritual likenesses”, therefore, is at once *intuitive* and *evident* as to the divine “*prescnce*”, but *inevident* and *veiled* as to the divine “*essence*”.

66. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, Ch. 24; *Works*, vol. I, p. 171.

67. *The Obscure Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, Ch. 20; *Works*, vol. II, p. 440.

68. *Ibid.*

69. For example, in St. Paul’s case, Père Maréchal avails himself of these exceptions. Cf. *Etudes*, vol. II, pp. 26, 269. See below, pp. 116–117.

70. St. Bonaventure, *II Sent.*, d. 23, a. 2, q. 3, no. 6.

71. Henri Bremond, *A Literary History of Religious Thought in France*, trans. by K. L. Montgomery, Macmillan, New York, 1930; pp. 48–49.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### VISION IN THE CLEAR LIGHT OF GOD

#### 1. IS THE VISION OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE POSSIBLE IN THIS LIFE ?

*O living Flame of Love,  
That woundest tenderly  
My soul in its inmost depth !  
As Thou art no longer grievous,  
Perfect Thy work, if it be Thy will,  
Break the web in this sweet encounter.<sup>1</sup>*

THE LAST “web” which still remains to be broken, that the soul may be raised up to union, is life in the body. This web, though it has already become transparent, suffices none the less to put off the hour of immersion in the beatifying vision wherein God, etymologically “incomprehensible” to every created intelligence even to the *created* intelligence of Christ, will however finally be “known as evident”.

On this side of that web, which death alone (herein lies its glorious privilege) can break, God remains a “hidden God” (Isa. xlv. 15), Whom the Spouse of the Canticle of Canticles beholds “looking through the lattices” (Cant. ii. 9), Whom “no one has at any time seen” (John i. 18 ; 1 John iv. 12), Who “dwells in light inaccessible”, Whom “no man”, St. Paul insists, “has seen or can see” (1 Tim. vi. 16). It is only later

that we shall see Him "face to face" (1 Cor. 'xiii. 12), "just as He is" (1 John iii. 2); for now "we walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. v. 7).

In Exodus (xxxiii. 18-23), it is related that Moses might glimpse the glory of Jehovah, but it was not given him to see His face; "Moses said: Show me thy glory. Jehovah answered: I will show thee all good, and I will proclaim in the name of the Lord before thee; . . . and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me. And again Jehovah said: *Thou canst not see my face; for man shall not see me and live . . .* Behold, there is a place with me, and thou shalt stand upon the rock. And when my glory shall pass, I will set thee in a hole of the rock, and protect thee with my right hand, till I pass: and I will take away my hand, and thou shalt see me from behind, *but my face thou canst not see*".

To see the face of God, one must die. Can this solemn declaration suffer an exception? St. Augustine believed so, and on his authority likewise did St. Thomas Aquinas and numerous theologians. Specifically, they thought that Moses, the Doctor of the Jews, and Paul, the Doctor of the Gentiles,<sup>2</sup> had experienced, in the heart of that "death" which is rapture, the vision of the divine essence, but only fleetingly, precariously, not as all-fulfilling, not as glorifying one's soul; so that Moses and Paul continued to walk in faith, as to their "state", though they were momentarily vouchsafed vision, as to their "act", and thus they remained suspended as it were "mid-way between this life and the next".<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Moses and Paul, the two pre-eminent Doctors, will have passed through the

“cloud of unknowing” that they might enter into the supreme Light wherein God shows His face openly.

If one accepts this exegesis, which is based on the authority of Augustine more than on that of the biblical texts,<sup>4</sup> and which precisely for this reason appears to be gradually losing favour among exegetes and theologians, it would, however, be unfitting, I think, to attempt to stretch such an interpretation any farther than the holy Doctor himself did.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. THE DIALECTIC OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF HEAVEN

When faith gives place to God (“faith is midnight, God is noon”); when our intellects, inwardly confronted by the light of glory, shall at last be touched immediately by the fire of the divine essence, now become the limitless “intelligible form”<sup>6</sup> wherein the divine infinity shall be presented to us just as It is; when God shall have given us His light, that we may see His light, then shall we all quench our thirst at the fountain of Life, that of this Water all from the beginning may drink their fill (no emptiness being in them, nothing left unfilled and no possible inconstancy therefore, nor ennui, nor succession): each one eternally—according to the capacity fixed by his thirst, his desire, his love, in this life, yet all being satisfied totally. And the marvellous, the inexpressible dialectic of this knowledge of the elect is that they shall be forever insatiable and at the same time forever filled: “They that eat me shall yet hunger; and they that

drink me *shall yet thirst*", says Ecclesiasticus (xxiv. 29); while St. John says (iv. 13): "He who drinks of the water that I will give him *shall never thirst*".

Moreover (though this is one of the secondary dialectics of the knowledge of heaven), the elect in a single glance, by a "movement without movement", will be able to enter into the divine Light and remain fixed therein, or descend again to the world of creatures. The elect will possess, as it were, a two-fold knowledge: *matutinal* knowledge, by which they will see the Word and the ideal, prototypal, exemplary, living being which all things prior to their concrete existence have in the Word (for "that which has been made, lives in Him", just as a work of art, before its actual production, lives in the mind of the artist); and *vesperal* knowledge, by which they will descend from the Word, that by a kind of precipitant knowledge they may grasp things as they are in their own nature and in their concrete, existential realization. There again, but in a new way, they "shall go in and out, and shall find pastures" (John x. 9).

### 3. "I SHALL KNOW EVEN AS I AM KNOWN"

"In this is charity: not as though we had loved God, but because He hath first loved us" (1 John iv. 10). It is because God has first—from the beginning—loved us that He has implanted in the depths of our being something of His own love, through which in turn we are enabled to love Him.

In like manner must we speak of knowledge. Knowledge lies not in audaciously lifting up one's eyes to God, but is the result of His having first known us;

because He has first known us, He has left, from His glance, a certain power deep down in us, whereby we can in turn know Him. "Thou wouldst not have sought Me, had not I already found thee." Had God not first found us, our search for Him would have been without hope. All knowledge of Him is but a kind of recognition. The true way of knowing God is to suffer oneself to be known by Him.<sup>8</sup>

The chains of life here below, however, prevent us "in part" from meeting His glance. When those chains shall have fallen away, the mystery of the anteriorities of the divine knowledge shall be unveiled, the soul then seeing that she shall know in the way she herself has been known: "Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12).

The whole river of divine Light, flowing down upon me from God since the first instant of my existence, can at last reascend to Him unimpeded by me. The divine circle of knowledge will finally be closed—but upon an Abyss.

#### 4. THE DIVINE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

"In no case is there any likeness between the creature and the Creator which is not outweighed by the unlikeness" (Fourth Lateran Council).

It is the infinite distance, separating the creature from the Creator, which stretches our human words to the limit, once we try to make them spell out the ineffable Name.

How indeed could this ineluctable over-distension fail to betray a striving, a suffering, an unsatisfied desire, a restlessness, sometimes even great strain, in

us? "When one speaks lovingly of God, all human words are like lions become blind, seeking a watering place in the desert."<sup>9</sup> Dionysius the Mystic persists in tyrannizing over human language with his superlatives; there are roarings in Ruysbroeck; and apophatic theology finds rest only in the depths of silence. St. Paul himself suffers from the inadequacy of a mode of speech continuously over-taxed by the lyricism of his love, to the point of falling to pieces.

God alone can bear the burden of the finiteness of the created world; God alone can use human words to say divine things, without having to do violence to those words. Jesus was never provoked by the weakness of human words; He was not subject to their limitations; He did not employ superlatives; and yet He made human words say what they had never said before concerning the mystery of the intimate life of God, the strictness of His justice, the depth and gentleness of His forgiveness, the tenderness of His love.

#### FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. St. John of the Cross, from poem entitled "The Living Flame of Love", *Works*, vol. II, p. 403.

2. Cited in Moses' case is the text from the Book of Numbers (xii. 8): "For I speak to him mouth to mouth, and not by riddles and figures, doth he see the Lord"—*in specie*, says the Septuagint, and St. Augustine comments: ". . . in that species (intelligible subsistent Form—*Tr.*) in which God is" (*De Genesi ad litt.*, XII, no. 55). And in St. Paul's case there is cited the rapture described in 2 Cor. xii. 2-4.

3. St. Thomas, ST. II-II, 180, 5. The relevant texts are analysed penetratingly in Père Maréchal's two chapters: "La vision de Dieu au sommet de la contemplation d'après saint Augustin"

and "Le sommet de la contemplation d'après saint Thomas", in his *Etudes sur la psychologie des mystiques*, vol. II, pp. 145-189 and 193-254.

4. For the New Testament, the negations of John i. 18, 1 John iv. 12, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, 2 Cor. v. 7, seem to me too absolute to be balanced by 2 Cor. xii. 2-4. And, for the Old Testament, the passages cited, notably Num. xii. 8, are too fragile a foundation for certitude: an indication whereof is the fact that St. John of the Cross (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, Ch. 24; *Works*, vol. I, p. 170) bases the vision of Moses upon a text in Exodus (xxxiii. 18-23) which, St. Augustine forcefully maintains (*De Trinitate*, II, no. 27), can have no value at all in this connection. Consequently, in a note entitled *Moïse et saint Paul, ont-ils eu la vision de Dieu dès ici-bas?* ("Revue Thomiste", 1930, p. 75), Père Lavaud is able to conclude "that a Thomist is in no way unfaithful to the spirit and the solid doctrine of his master in maintaining that he is at liberty to hold a different opinion on this point than St. Thomas did, and in thinking that, if St. Thomas were living today, he would himself feel freer in regard to the always exceptional authority of St. Augustine".

The whole effort of Père Maréchal, on the other hand, consists in elevating the "vision" of Moses and of Paul to the rank of a paradigm, so that he may thereby explain certain statements of the mystics, especially of Ruysbroeck. But it seems to me difficult to establish, even respecting the vision of Ruysbroeck: (1) that the latter's "obscure night" is truly *evidential*; (2) that, in this case, the evidence is truly evidence of the divine *essence* and not, for instance, evidence only of the divine *presence*. (See above, p. 113, note 65.)

See the capital text in Ruysbroeck's *The Adornment of Spiritual Marriage*, Bk. III, Ch. 1 and 2 (in French translation by the Benedictines of Wisques, vol. III, pp. 208, 210): "*Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go out and meet Him*. We must now explain these words, and we must understand that they refer to a super-essential mode of contemplation wherein all holiness and all perfect life is swallowed up as in an abyss . . . To apprehend and to comprehend God, in a manner beyond all comparison, God as He is in Himself, is to be God with God, there being no intermediary nor any difference whatsoever which could place between Him and us an obstacle or any medial thing . . .

Our heavenly Father wants us to be seers, for He is the Father of Lights: and this is why He utters eternally, ceaselessly, directly, in the hidden depths of our spirit, one unique unfathomable word, and nothing more. And in this word He expresses Himself, and says all things. And this word says nothing else than: SEE. And it is thus that the Son of eternal light is expressed and is born, in Whom one knows and sees all happiness . . . One must be lost to oneself in an absence of modes and in a darkness wherein all contemplative spirits are fruitfully engulfed . . . It is in the depths of this darkness, where the loving spirit is dead to itself, that the revelation of God and eternal life begins. For it is there that an incomprehensible Light shines and is engendered: God's very own Son, in Whom we behold Life without end."

If in this text one sees the *visio per essentiam*, we should be inclined to lend an ear to the saying of John of Saint-Simon: that the writings of St. John of the Cross "are excellent, but there is still a life *above and beyond all that*". Nevertheless, explaining, in *A Spiritual Canticle*, the non-evidential character of the knowledge of love, St. John of the Cross will speak in a manner very much like that of Ruysbroeck.

5. The only extension which could then be foreseen would concern the Virgin, to whom certain theologians since the Renaissance have granted a vision, itself transitory and not beatifying, of the divine essence.

6. St. Thomas, ST. I, 12, 5.

7. It is a question of one single act of seeing, at one time terminating in the eternal *exemplarity* of things and, at another, redescending even to their concrete *existentiality*. Cf. St. Thomas, ST. I, 58, 7.—There will be other, secondary modes of knowing.

8. Permit me to select these lines from the attestations, often disturbing but in this case magnificent, of the Persian Bisthâmî (died 875): "For thirty years I travelled in search of God, and when, at the end of this time, I opened my eyes, I saw that it was He Who sought me." "A voice cried to me: O Abu Yazid, what is it you desire? I replied: I desire to desire nothing, for I am the desired and You are He Who desires!" (E. Dermengham, *Vie des saints musulmans*, pp. 221 and 214).

9. Léon Bloy, *Le Salut par les Juifs*, Ch. 28.





